SPECIAL 85TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

THE NEW REPUBLIC

ovember 8, 1999

Is the Digital Revolution Forever?
By Robert W. Lucky

Fin de Siècle Art Blues
By Jed Perl

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Nixon, Hiss, and the Jews
By Sam Tanenhaus

Camus's Faithless Century
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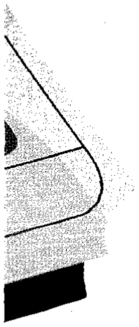

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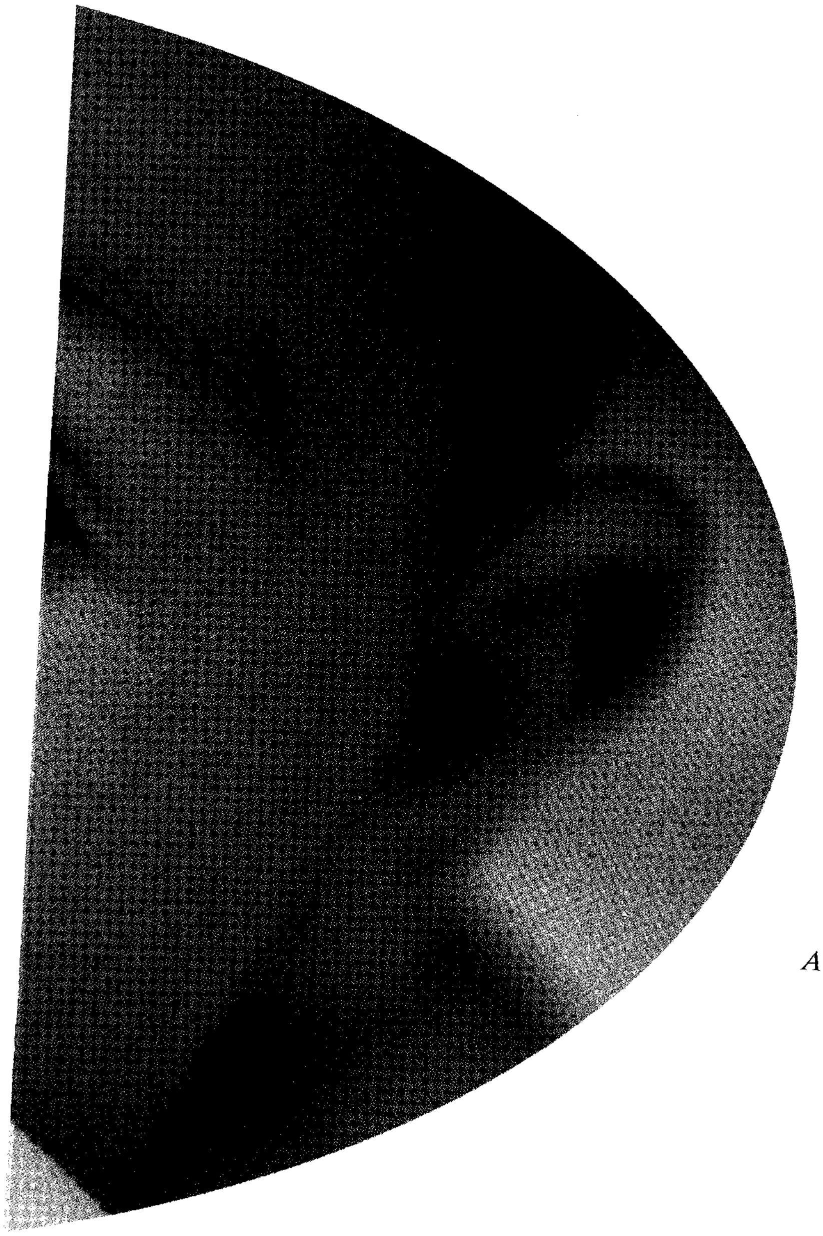

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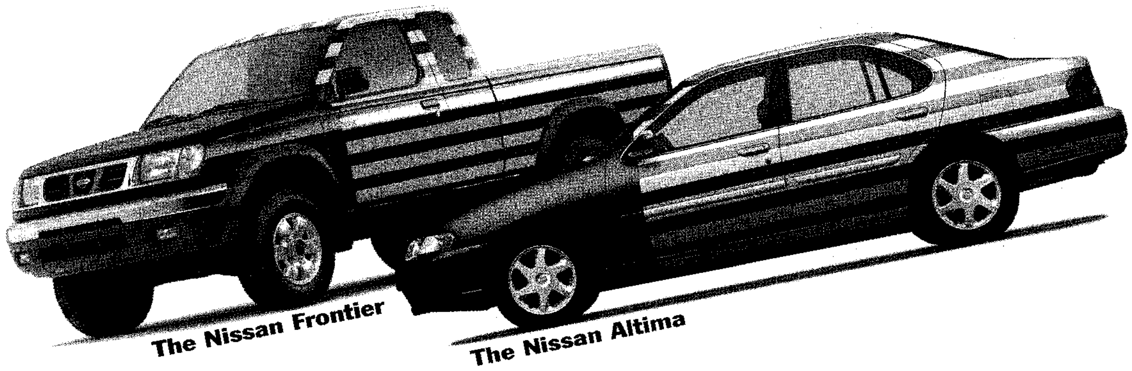

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THE NEW REPUBLIC
WASHINGTON, D.C.
NOVEMBER 8, 1999
ISSUE 4,425

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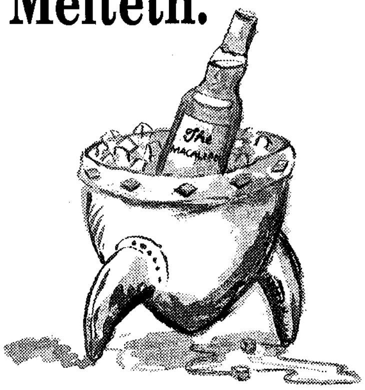
The Iceman Melteth.



A CHEQUE DRAWN ON THE BANK OF ICELAND accompanied by a request for six bottles of The Macallan Malt Whisky, started a *lively debate* at the Distillery the other day. Was it wise for these stern countrymen of ice and fire to seek out the mellow blandishments of The Macallan? That billowing sherry-oak redolence, with its hints of the *comfortable South*, should be treated with caution by the hardy sons of ERIK THE RED, argued our Moral Tutor. "A few sips could undo centuries of stoicism." But our Sales Director prevailed, and The Macallan was despatched the same evening. However, if you are planning a trip to Iceland, it might now be wise to include a paper hat and some streamers.

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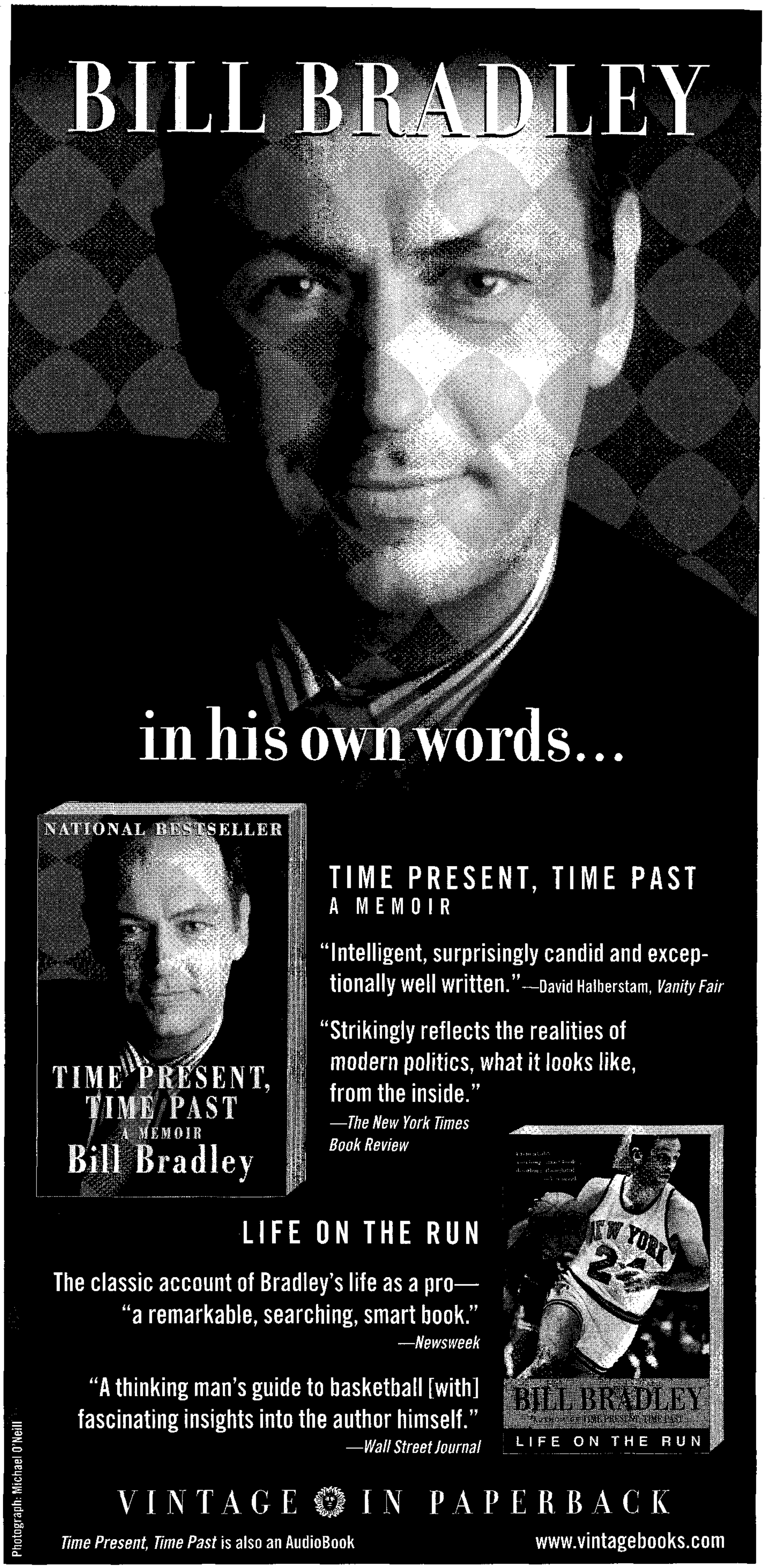

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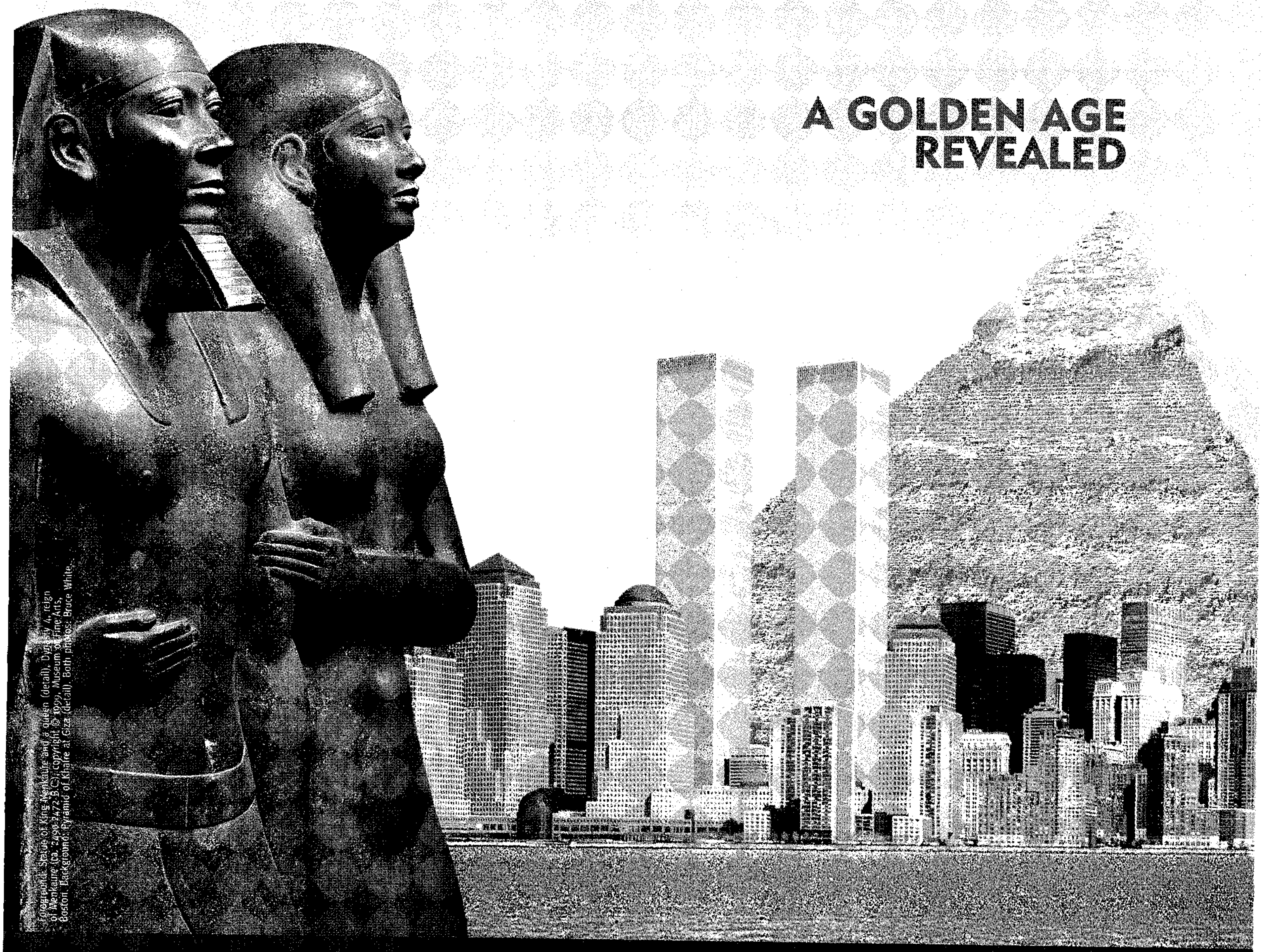

A GOLDEN AGE
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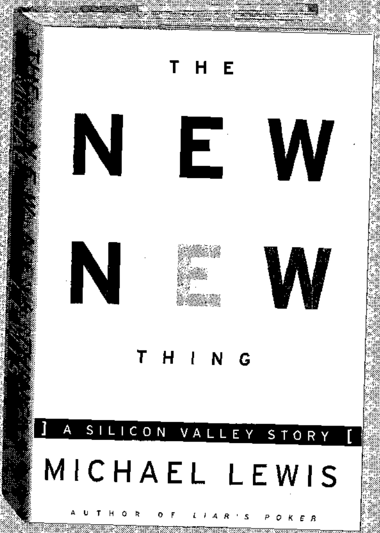

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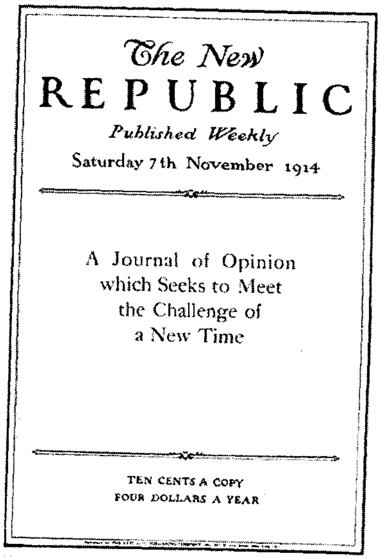
A Note to Our Readers

"THE NEW REPUBLIC is frankly an experiment," the founding editors of this magazine wrote in its first issue, dated November 7, 1914. "It is an attempt to find national audience for a journal of interpretation and opinion. Many people believe that such a journal is out of place in America; that if a periodical is to be popular, it must first of all be entertaining, or that if it is to be serious, it must be detached and select."


The New
REPUBLIC
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Saturday 7th November 1914

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which Seeks to Meet
the Challenge of
a New Time

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Eighty-five years later, on the cusp of a new millennium, THE NEW REPUBLIC is still an experiment. If anything, the idea of publishing a magazine that aspires to be both serious and lively seems a more dubious proposition than it did when this century began. And yet this experiment has produced a rich history of success—a success that we celebrate with this special eighty-fifth anniversary issue. For 85 years now, TNR has not merely commented upon politics and ideas. It has shaped politics and ideas—serving both as liberalism's most articulate proponent and, when necessary, its sharpest critic.

The magazine's future should be no less bright. This eighty-fifth anniversary issue is the penultimate issue to be edited by Charles Lane. He took over as editor more than two years ago, and his steady hand, his disciplined intelligence, and his complicated mind can all be seen brightly in the roughly 100 issues he put out. We count ourselves fortunate that he will remain at the magazine as editor-at-large. On November 1, Peter Beinart will become the magazine's editor. He is a journalist's journalist and an intellectual's intellectual, at once at home with grand ideas and alert to stubborn little facts.

While many publications today treat politics as if it were little more than an entertaining but largely meaningless conflict of personalities, be assured that, under Peter Beinart's stewardship, TNR will maintain its commitment to the belief that American politics is a profound and compelling drama, and one best understood at the level of ideas. That belief has guided the magazine's ship through the past 85 years, and it will no doubt guide it into the future as well.

Martin Peretz, Editor-in-Chief and Chairman

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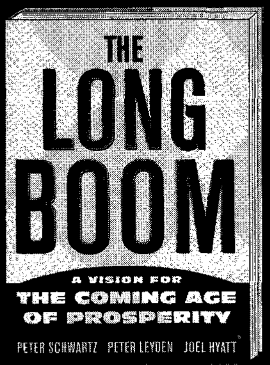

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CORRESPONDENCE

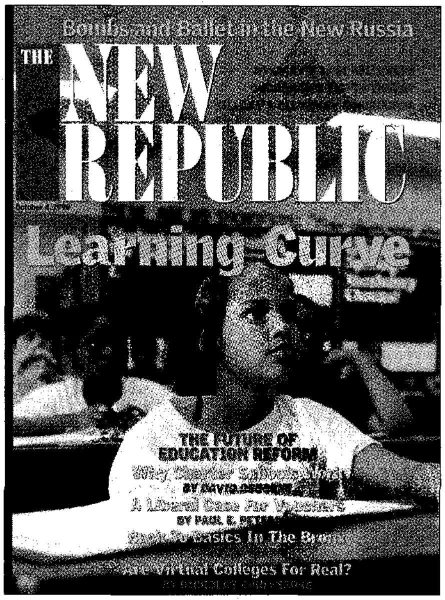
Classroom discussion

To the editors:
In his analysis of data on a school voucher program, Paul E. Peterson saw reason for optimism, noting that the characteristics of a few hundred students enrolled in private schools through a voucher program were comparable in a number of ways to those of the larger group of students who remained in a San Antonio, Texas, public school system ("A Liberal Case for Vouchers," October 4). But the similarities between these two groups in terms of income and race are hardly surprising when one considers the homogeneity of the school district's population (which is more than 90 percent economically disadvantaged and 93 percent Latino). Equally unsurprising, but a greater cause for concern, was that students who require special-education resources were half as likely to be admitted to private school as they were to remain in the public system (eight percent of all private school students required special education, versus 16 percent of public school students). This ratio likely belies an even larger discrepancy, because the nature and gravity of the required special-education services within each of these two groups were not specified.

It would be hard to believe that private schools accepted even as many as half their share of students with severe emotional disturbances, students requiring school-nurse-assisted observations and medical procedures, or students requiring intensive occupational or physical therapies during the school day. Over the past two decades, public schools have integrated a large majority of these students into regular school settings and provided them with the support they need to succeed, often incurring costs beyond those reimbursed through designated federal and state funds. One notable benefit of the success school districts have had with this effort is a large number of schoolchildren's broad acceptance of peers with many forms of disabilities. Another benefit has been that students with special needs experience easier transitions into the regular workforce, integrated living arrangements, and higher education.

Peterson contends that the voucher data will help us counter old fears. In fact, his data fuel arguments that vouchers will once again segregate the most disadvantaged populations and that public schools will bear a disproportionate burden of educating the most challenging students.

Howard L. Taras, M.D.
University of California at San Diego


Bombs and Ballet in the New Russia
THE NEW REPUBLIC
Learning Curve
THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION REFORM
A Liberal Case For Vouchers
Back To Basics In The Bronx
Are Virtual Colleges For Real?

To the editors:
In "Healthy Competition" (October 4), David Osborne celebrates charter schools as spurring improvement in neighboring public schools. He asserts that "competition works just as the reformers predicted.... [Charter schools] force school districts to innovate." We have just concluded a study of school choice and charter schools in Michigan, and our research suggests that Osborne's conclusions are misleading.

First, there is little evidence that charter schools are pioneering educational innovations, and there is virtually no evidence that they are "forcing" school districts to innovate or improve. The "innovations" that Osborne catalogues include all-day kindergarten, support for parental involvement, and "more attention to performance on standardized tests." These may be desirable changes in public schools, but they hardly qualify as new ideas; nor are they likely to bring about dramatic improvements in school performance.

Second, charter schools often compete with public schools not on the basis of improved educational quality but rather on the basis of more cohesive, more narrowly defined educational communities. Among Michigan's charter schools, there are African-centered schools, Native American schools, an Armenian school, schools preparing students for specific vocations (e.g., "hospitality"), and a number of schools that espouse "traditional values." School districts cannot compete in these niche markets because of their legal obligation to educate all children. Moreover, there is no reason why this kind of social sorting should lead to general improvements in education.

Finally, the rules matter. The effects of charter schools on the public school system vary significantly across states. The critical policy question is therefore not whether school choice is "good" or "bad" but how the emerging market for schooling should be structured. Different rules create different incentives and produce different outcomes. Carefully designed rules can make the market work more efficiently and effectively, which is in the interest of all children. Simply "unleashing" market forces in the public school system will not allow students to reap all the potential benefits of school choice. It may in fact do great harm, especially to those children who are worst served by the present system.

DAVID ARSEN
DAVID N. PLANK
GARY SYKES
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan

TO THE EDITORS:

I appreciated Nicholas Confessore's generally positive assessment of the academic value and quality of UCLA Extension's online program ("The Virtual University," October 4). Unfortunately, there was confusion on a number of substantive issues concerning the program's implementation and attribution of responsibilities.

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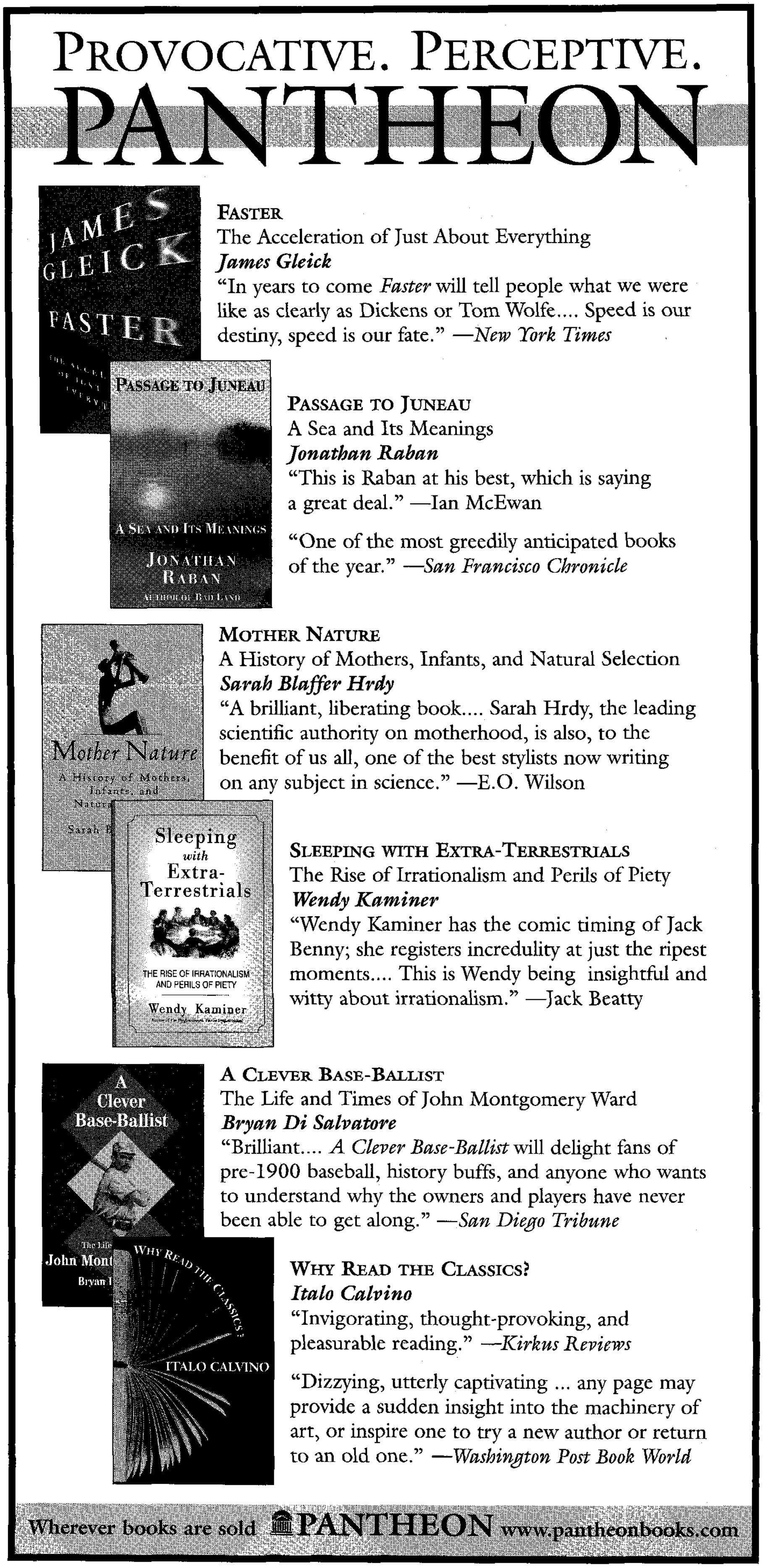
Another error concerns the fact that only educational institutions and their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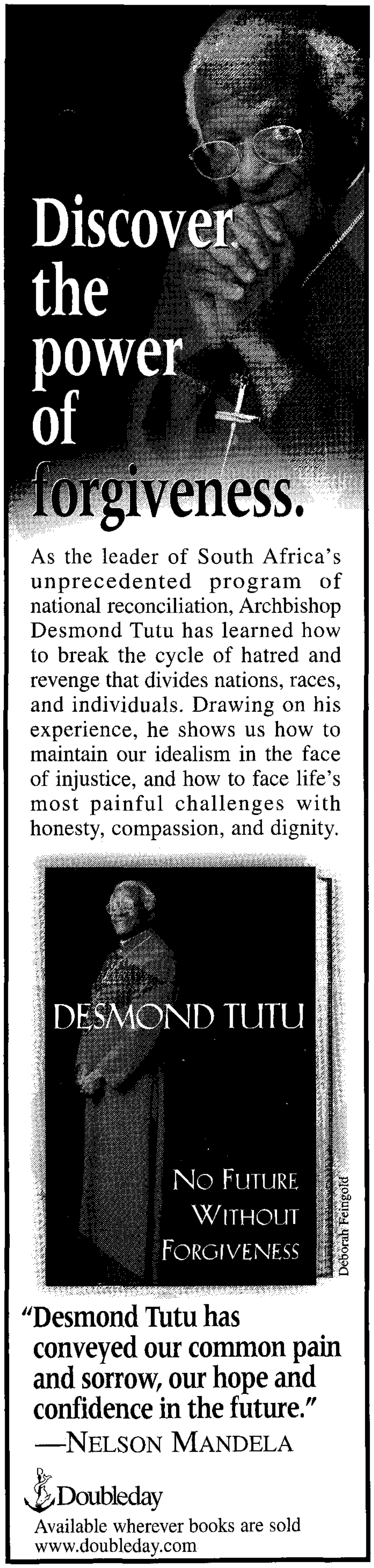
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Deborah Feingold

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programs are accredited, not technology and marketing companies. Thus, the reference to OLN's being accredited—rather than UCLA Extension—reveals confusion about widespread academic processes.

Thanks to our strong relationship with OLN and its commitment to excellent service, we have been able to achieve rapid growth of our distance learning program and a high level of student and instructor satisfaction. We are proud of our success together. That success is demeaned when the clear demarcation between academic and pedagogical responsibilities (UCLA's) and technological and nonacademic customer service responsibilities (OLN's) is inaccurately portrayed.

In consideration of my institution's nearly nine decades of attention to ensuring excellent and accessible educational experiences to adult learners in all media of delivery, I wish Confessore's otherwise thoughtful article had better conveyed these fundamental distinctions in roles.

ROBERT LAPINER
Dean
Continuing Education
and UCLA Extension
University of California at Los Angeles

TO THE EDITORS:

While Nicholas Confessore's article made some attempt to present the views of skeptics, it was far too easy on what one professor rightly called a "scam." One reason distance learning is a scam is the presumption that physical interaction is not an important component of the teaching process. In the online approach, the student reads the lecture for the week, has the option of e-mailing questions in response to it, and then completes the assignment. That's inadequate. When I lecture in a non-virtual classroom, students can stop me at any time—perhaps to ask for clarification before new material is introduced or to see if they can relate what we're doing that day to something else we've studied. Imagine the outcry if I said at the beginning of the semester, "Do not ask any questions as I lecture—save them until the end of the week, and I'll get to them then." That would be an outrageous dereliction of my teaching duty. Sure, one can get something out of what is essentially a high-tech correspondence course, but it should not be confused with real teaching.

DR. AEON J. SKOBLE
Visiting Assistant Professor of Philosophy
United States Military Academy
Via the Internet

TO THE EDITORS:

As an academic concerned about the spread of distance learning in higher education, I found Nicholas Confessore's account of the phenomenon misleading. Few people would deny that, as a method of making extension classes and education for adults returning to school more accessible, distance learning may hold some promise. But the issue is what happens when a digital version of a correspondence course makes its way to the heart of undergraduate education. In Florida's state university system, students can take an online political science course that will contribute directly to their B.A. degrees in that field. Nothing on their transcripts will indicate that this was anything other than a regular course taught in a classroom.

When UCLA, New York University, and other prestigious institutions that have jumped onto the digital bandwagon start handing out accredited degrees to undergraduates who have never seen the inside of a classroom or met a professor, then distance learning will have reached its apotheosis. Is this where we want higher education to go?

ALEX LICHTENSTEIN
Miami, Florida

TO THE EDITORS:

The articles by Paul E. Peterson, David Osborne, and Nicholas Confessore in your October 4 issue, as well as the editorial, "Lessons Learned," omit perhaps the most salient reform needed to help poor kids, who will be ill-equipped for employment in our increasingly technological era.

Most public school systems in the country do not include computer literacy among their requirements for graduation. In New York City—our largest, most technologically oriented urban center—the public school system is among those without such a requirement. A recent federal government study showed that, next to those of the South and of Appalachia, New York City underclass youth were, on a comparative basis, the least computer literate in the nation. What a scandal!

FREDERIC WILE
New York, New York

TO THE EDITORS:

In his piece on the Bronx's KIPP school ("Back to Basics in the Bronx," October 4), David Grann expressed some cynicism concerning the "unabashed indoctrination" evident at the school. But he evinced no doubts about KIPP's claims of "success." Only in passing did he mention, in the next-to-last paragraph of the piece, that these supposedly well-educated KIPP kids were still learning the multiplication tables and reading *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* in middle school.

In Maryland, students are required to pass a state-sponsored exam based on the fifth-grade reading level before getting their high school diplomas. We call that "setting standards." Now, in the Bronx, they're keeping kids in school until five o'clock in the afternoon so sixth graders can learn elementary math.

JOHN H. BRANTLEY
Baltimore, Maryland

Tuning in

TO THE EDITORS:

Mark Crispin Miller and Robert W. McChesney are on target in sounding an alarm about the impact of media concentration on democratic discussion ("Monopoly Game," October 4). Their article is part of a growing chorus of concern raised by a wide variety of communications-industry critics. If it's not the buying of giant companies by companies even more giant, it's the lack of minorities on the networks' schedules, the incessant coverage of Monica, or the bloody, titillating programs. It seems we have little choice about television other than to turn it off.

But television reflects not only the taste of TV programmers but also a set of policy decisions made by the people we vote for. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) licenses local stations to use the people's property (the public airwaves) for the good of the local community. Congress funds the FCC. And Congress determines the broad guidelines for local TV stations.

In 1996, Congress bent to the will of the broadcast lobby, acceding to a massive $70 billion giveaway of public airwaves to local stations (presumably for HDTV). Even Bob Dole called this giveaway a national scandal. Congress attempted to muffle the debate by conditioning the giveaway on the old rule that local TV stations get free licenses because they serve the public interest. Yet, while more than 70 local stations are sending HDTV programs such as "The Tonight Show" and "Monday Night Football" over the public airwaves, the FCC has yet to hold a public proceeding to determine what is in "the public interest."

Notice that our representatives in Congress have criticized FCC Chairman William Kennard for approving mergers too slowly. But they have been silent about the FCC's giving away licenses without determining what local stations must do to serve local communities in exchange.

You can do more than just get mad about the mergers or turn off your television. Contact the FCC, find out where your U.S. representative or senator stands on the as-yet-unwritten obligation of local stations to serve local communities, and demand better television in exchange for the giveaway.

MARK I. LLOYD
People for Better TV
Washington, D.C.

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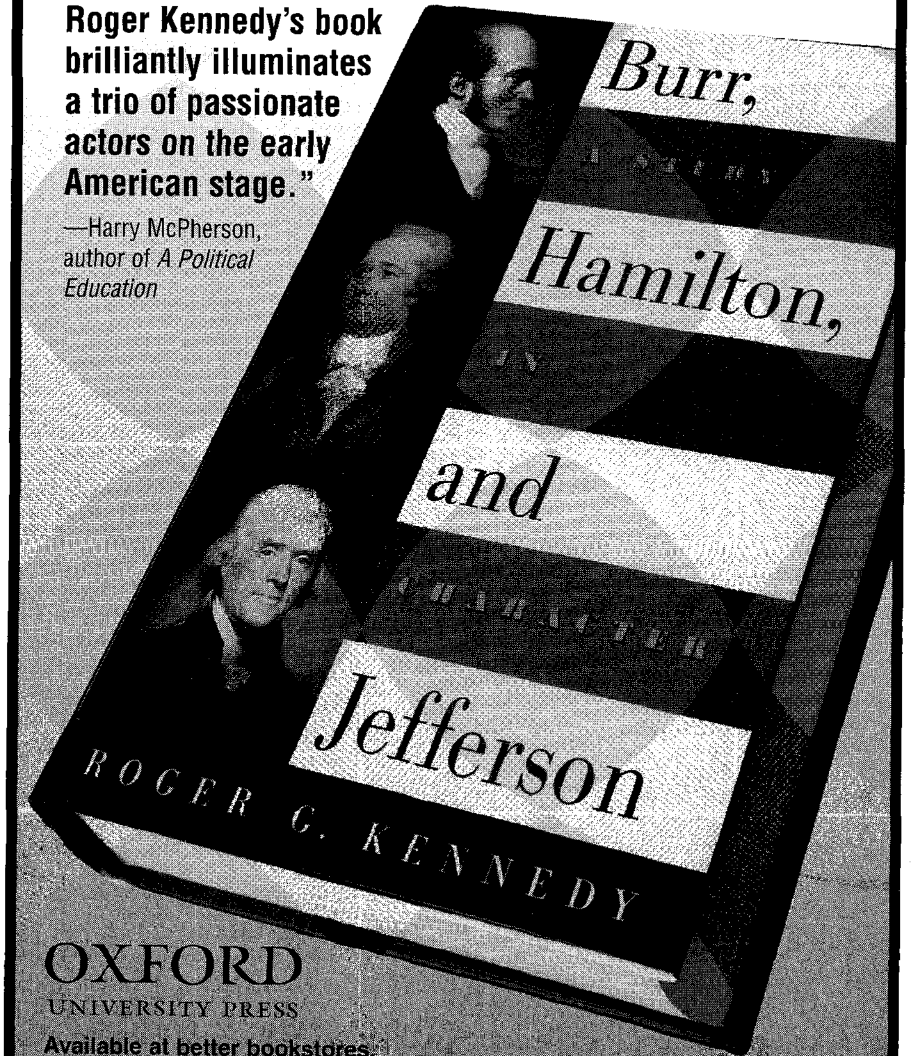
—Harry McPherson, author of *A Political Education*



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FROM WASHINGTON

Gone Awry

When Julius Nyerere died on October 14, obituaries hailed the man who ruled the African nation of Tanzania from 1961 through 1985 as a "beacon of integrity," an "elder statesman," even a "benevolent dictator." He was, President Clinton said, "a pioneering leader for freedom and self-government in Africa" whose "legacy of determination and compassion lives on in the generous people of Tanzania today."

To be sure, the press noted the fact that this determined and compassionate man was also single-handedly responsible for the economic destruction of his potentially wealthy nation and, hence, the suffering or starvation of millions of people. Under Nyerere, Tanzania's economy stagnated to the point where, despite the infusion of over $10 billion in foreign assistance, the average Tanzanian gets by on about $200 per year. The main cause was Nyerere's program of "villagization," under which some eleven million rural people were uprooted from their ancestral homes between 1973 and 1976 and herded, often forcibly, into mostly desolate locations chosen for them by Nyerere's bureaucrats. (After his death, Nyerere was praised for his role in African international politics. But, even here, his finest deed—the ouster of Uganda's bloodthirsty Idi Amin by Tanzanian troops in 1975—soured as Nyerere's man, Milton Obote, went on a killing binge.)

History, or at least the first draft of it, appears ready to excuse Nyerere—for two reasons. First, for all its destructiveness, forced agricultural collectivization in Tanzania was not the outright campaign of murder it was in, say, Mao's China (though Nyerere was impressed by what he saw on a visit to China during his Cultural Revolution and announced the villagization plan upon his return). Resisters had their old homes burned or were denied famine relief, but weren't executed en masse.

Second, to all appearances, Nyerere's intentions were good. Personally mild-mannered and incorruptible (though many people in his government were not), he genuinely believed that radical collectivism offered an "African" way to make Tanzania both more prosperous and more just. He did manage to keep Tanzania free of tribal warfare and to expand access to basic education. "If I had my time over again, I would do it much the same way," he told Paul Lewis of *The New York Times* upon his retirement from politics in 1990.

Should we leave it at that? Nyerere died at a time of growing support for the idea that political leaders should face individual accountability for war crimes, human rights violations, and corruption. From Pol Pot to Pinochet, human rights groups have sought leaders' retrospective prosecution and punishment. Indeed, two of Nyerere's former African colleagues, Uganda's Amin and Ethiopia's Mengistu Haile Mariam, another ruler who villagized his people into starvation, have been mentioned as candidates for the dock. But the issue of Nyerere's accountability never came up. Apparently, we still lack a vocabulary of accountability for cases of policy errors that are so massive, so stupid, so costly, and yet so foreseeable that they qualify, if not as crimes, then at least as the governmental equivalent of gross negligence.

Such a vocabulary certainly didn't exist during the time Nyerere was running Tanzania into the ground. To the contrary, he was the darling of Western aid agencies, especially those of the Scandinavian countries, and of the World Bank, which poured billions into Nyerere's country to support villagization and other harebrained development schemes. In a way, Nyerere made non-alignment Tanzania's leading export; at the height of the cold war, he presented his lofty program of African socialism as a middle way between Soviet-style development and the market model of the West. This brilliantly appealed to the narcissism of the Scandinavians—so proud of their welfare states and so contemptuous of American-style free enterprise. And it was brilliantly calculated to exploit the guilty conscience of Robert McNamara, who spent his years running the World Bank from 1968 to 1981 trying to expiate his sins of Vietnam through unquestioning support for various authentic Third World progressives.

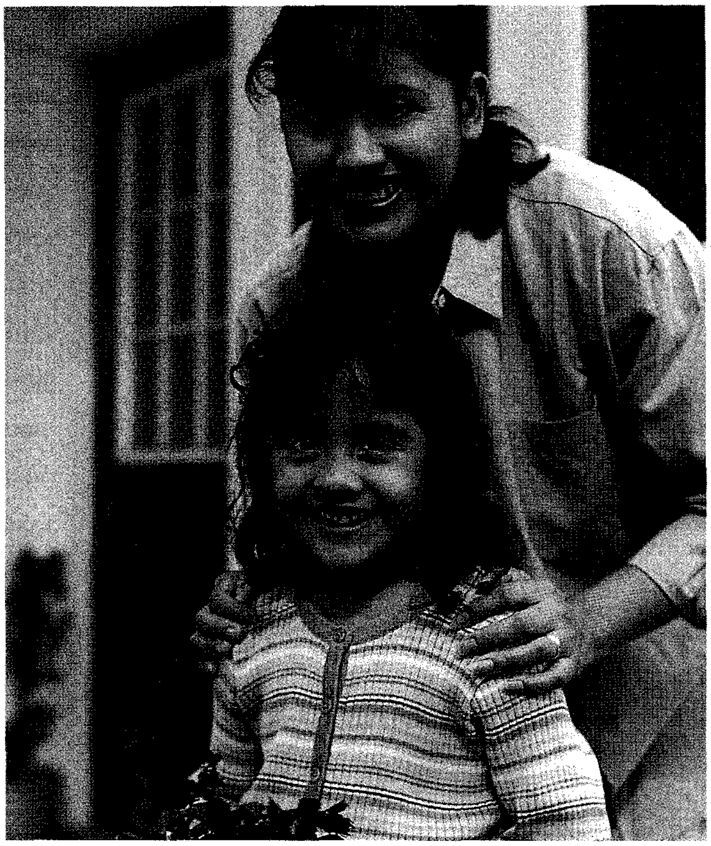
If there ever had been a trial for Nyerere—a class-action tort suit on behalf of the Tanzanian rural proletariat?—this record of Western indulgence could be submitted as Exhibit A for the defense. It might even induce me to vote for Nyerere or at least to mitigate the damages. It certainly places the issue of Nyerere's good intentions in proper perspective. Nyerere was not so much a do-gooder as he was an adherent of a widely held mid-twentieth-century vision of modernism and modernization. It was a vision that identified all institutions of traditional societies as automatically pernicious and sought improvement through the swift destruction and replacement of those institutions.

As James C. Scott shows in his book *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed,* both the World Bank and the British-educated Nyerere assumed that the "conservatism" of the Tanzanian peasantry was an obstacle to development that should be overcome at all cost. It simply never occurred to them that, perhaps, the peasants' customary forms of herding and crop rotation were time-tested adaptations to the ecological and technological conditions of the country. For Nyerere and his sponsors, larger villages were not only a means of bringing the people under the purview of a central government so that they could be served with public goods such as clean water (and politically controlled); the villages were *aesthetically* necessary. They corresponded not only to Nyerere's and the Bank's ideology but, more importantly, to their notion of what a "proper village" (Nyerere's phrase) in a modern society should look like—little houses arrayed by a roadside, not thatched huts connected by winding footpaths.

As Scott notes, such a "high modernist" aesthetic underlies many of the absurd and ultimately ruinous or bloody social experiments of this century, from Stalin's to Mengistu's. But, as the Tanzanian case shows, it can also be detected in more benign, even democratic, settings: the forbiddingly symmetrical high-rise public housing projects built in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s were the products of right-thinking planners and public officials who assumed that was how modern people ought to live. (The first time I saw the Marzahn high-rise in the former East Berlin, I was struck by its resemblance to the Cabrini-Green complex in Chicago.)

Accountability for Nyerere should have occurred at the polls, but, confident of their own good intentions and sharing Nyerere's paternalistic mentality, his external sponsors never insisted on it. Let us mourn not only Nyerere, then, but also the vast waste generated by all of this century's hubristic utopian schemes, of which the Tanzanian catastrophe is, alas, just one relatively bloodless instance. The lesson is that democracy is necessary to social reform—in both the Third World and the First. Only democracy can ensure that leaders proceed with appropriate respect both for the difficulty of achieving even modest sustainable improvement and for the social wisdom that some ostensibly "backward" traditions actually embody. After all, to the victims of grand plans gone awry, good intentions don't matter nearly as much as bad results do.

CHARLES LANE



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CAMPAIGN JOURNAL

Seen But Not Heard

A FEW WEEKS ago, the Bush campaign sent out an unusually informative bulletin. The governor had released the results of his medical exam, conducted by one Kenneth H. Cooper, M.D., M.P.H. In those pages we learned, for the first time, that George W. Bush's body is 19.11 percent fat, his cholesterol count is 176, and his triglyceride level is 45. The campaign told reporters "to schedule an appointment with Dr. Cooper" (would my HMO pay for it?) for more information.

Don't get me wrong. I am happy for Bush that he has such an impressive lipid profile. But we need to know more about what's in his brain, not what's in his arteries. And, when it comes to intellectual examinations, Bush is not so willing a patient.

Six weeks ago, I wrote of my fruitless six-month quest to plumb the depths—or shallows, if you ask his critics—of Bush's mind (see "Touchy," September 27). Since then, readers have asked whether the governor has been shamed into being interviewed. But they underestimate his determination. "It's not going to happen between now and the end of the year," says Karen Hughes, Bush's communications director. Presumably, his schedule will open up in January, on the eve of the Iowa caucus.

But don't pity me. It's reasonable that Bush, with 1,500 interview requests pending, wouldn't bother with a liberal magazine that was hostile to his old man. Instead, save the pity for guys such as Bill Minutaglio, of *The Dallas Morning News*, and Mickey Herskowitz, of the *Houston Chronicle*. Minutaglio wrote a sympathetic biography of Bush—yet Bush declined to be interviewed for the book. And Bush fired his campaign-book ghostwriter, sports columnist Herskowitz. The Bush folks say it's because Herskowitz was late; Herskowitz, though he considers Bush a friend, says he had trouble getting details. He told the *Chronicle* that when he asked for substance, he got 1,000 Bush speeches, but "it was actually five speeches the governor has given 200 times." Now Hughes is writing the book; don't expect it to be a kiss-and-tell.

Though I didn't get an interview, I did garner empathy from others in the press—even the ones Bush talks to. "You don't want an interview, anyway," said a network hotshot, trying to cheer me. "He doesn't say anything." An Arizona reporter told me his visit with Bush was so restricted that he was told what type of questions he could ask. Journalists, for the most part, have reached the conclusion that Bush, in a bubble, is unwilling to reveal what or how he thinks. Eric Stern, a young reporter for Iowa's *Waterloo Courier*, got half an hour with Bush. "He was so charming I almost neglected to notice that he didn't answer any of my questions," Stern says.

Bush does seem happy to level with *some* people. At a primary school in Bakersfield, California, one child told Bush that she had "a poodle dog." Bush was ready: "I have a dog named Spot. We have three cats, too. One cat is named Cowboy, one cat is named Willie, and another cat is named Ernie." Bush told of how he rescued Ernie, a stray, and adopted him. "Ernie the cat never gave up, and now he's running the governor's mansion," he said. It was a brilliant performance. Bush revealed nothing but connected perfectly.

Now, Bush's opponents are trying to make an issue of his silence. When GOP candidates meet for a debate on October 28, Bush won't be there. "'Don't ask, don't tell' is no way to run a presidential campaign," Steve Forbes chides. Gary Bauer's line: "What are you afraid of, Governor?" The pressure has become sufficiently intense that Bush has agreed to a December debate in New Hampshire.

Bush's foes want him to talk more because they think he'll get into trouble no matter how he answers questions. In the controversy over Pat Buchanan's Hitler apologia, Bush tried to be inclusive, earning barbs that he's unprincipled. But when Bush showed principle by defending the working poor from congressional marauders, Tom DeLay sniffed that "he obviously doesn't understand how Congress works."

Bush's latest move earned him dreaded comparisons to Clinton's triangulation. He trashed fellow Republicans for painting an "America slouching toward Gomorrah" and for confusing "the need for limited government with a disdain for government itself." He's absolutely correct, of course, but the right howled. "The more he speaks, the more troubled I am becoming about his candidacy," Rush Limbaugh bellowed.

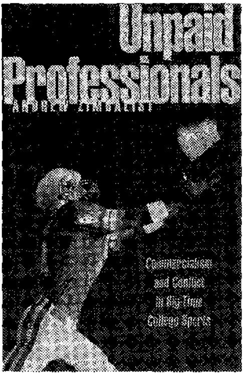
Strategically, Bush's caution makes perfect sense; when you're the prohibitive favorite, why blow it by talking too much and risking a gaffe? He took that risk with Tucker Carlson, a conservative writer he trusted. But Carlson's piece in *Talk* magazine made Bush look foul-mouthed and insensitive. Since then, Bush's staff has insisted that reporters focus their queries more. And, even then, he gets burned. He unwisely discussed books with Maureen Dowd. "I've always liked John La Care, Le Carrier, or however you pronounce his name," he said. He told *The San Francisco Chronicle* that the feds shouldn't compensate states for funds spent on illegal immigrants. Never mind that Bush supported a lawsuit by the states seeking just such payments. A spokeswoman said he misunderstood the question.

But the shy silence causes many in the press to conclude that Bush isn't ready for prime time. "Is Dubya Dumb?" *U.S. News & World Report* asked in July. I still don't think so. He is not learned, to be sure, but he is smart and savvy. Still, the empty-vessel question will remain as long as he stays cloistered. His October 5 education speech was laudable; he called for a strong federal role in education and for establishing something close to national standards. But was this Bush talking, or was he reading lines? Hard to say—"surrogates" took the questions.

I confess that my desire for a tête-à-tête with Bush has verged on the desperate. I've considered contributing to his campaign in order to get into a Bush reception—but even that might not work. At a New York fund-raiser, I watched fat cats leave the room after each had a photo-op with Bush. They seemed to get about ten seconds apiece with him, which seemed reasonable, given how many of them there were. One fellow told me he had raised $5,000 to get into the reception. If it cost him $5,000 to get ten seconds with Bush, a 15-minute interview would cost me $450,000.

Instead, I must settle for "media availabilities," Bush's mini press conferences. Reporters, because of their limited access to the candidate, tend to use the brief sessions either to test him or to trap him. It shouldn't be long before reporters ask Bush to recite pi to seven decimal places or to name Asian prime ministers. At a recent session in New York, Mark Halperin of ABC News attempted an essay question. He asked Bush to talk about the four national elections this decade and how they shaped the conservative image. It was a deliberate attempt to explore Bush's brain. The results? "Well, '88 was great," Bush responded, "and '92 stunk." Moments later, our brief glimpse into the mind of Bush was over.

DANA MILBANK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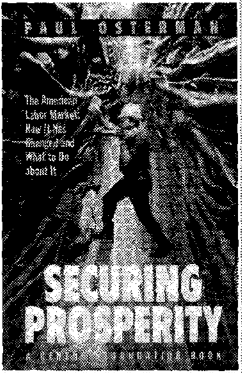
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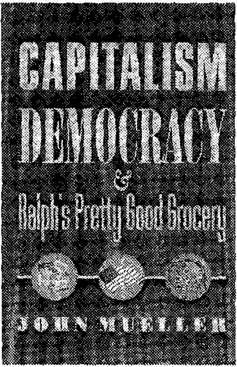
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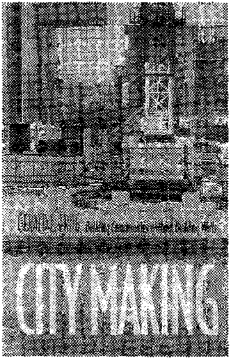
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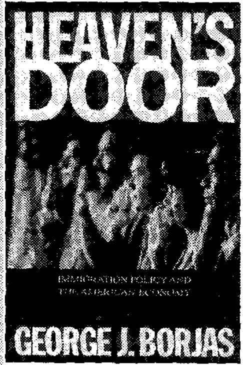
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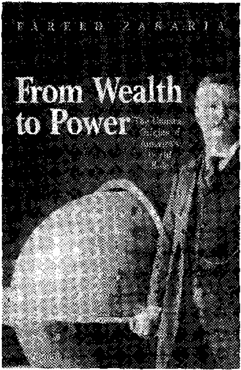
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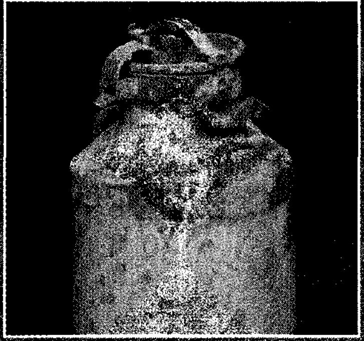

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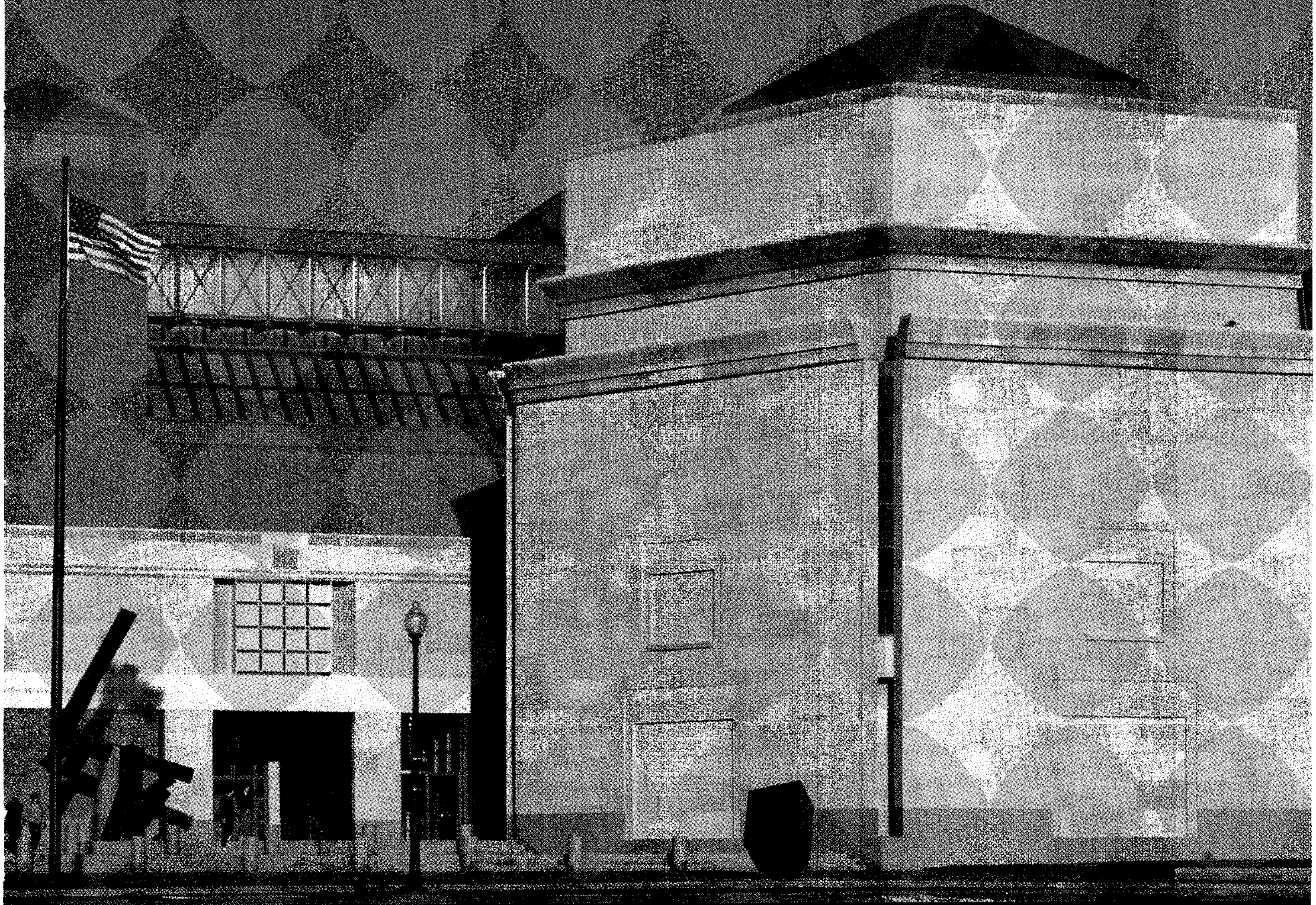

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The Trouble With Treaties

SURELY ARMS CONTROL must rank as one of the emblematic political causes of the past 50 years. Ever since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which were soon followed by the Soviet Union's acquisition of nuclear weapons and the onset of the arms race, the dream of one day stuffing the terrible genie back into his bottle has animated millions of people around the world, but none, perhaps, more passionately than American liberals.

Today, the cold war has ended without a nuclear shot having been fired. Yet this was not exactly a vindication of the cause of arms control. Rather, one remarkable characteristic of America's victory in its long, twilight struggle with Soviet communism was the relatively modest role that arms treaties between the two superpowers ultimately played in the peaceful denouement. There was the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963; SALT I of 1972 and Gerald Ford's Vladivostok accord (both of which actually permitted some increases in each side's stockpiles); and SALT II, which was signed by President Carter but never ratified by the Senate. Carter withdrew the treaty after the USSR invaded Afghanistan.

The early Reagan years were marked by unabashed opposition to arms control even in the face of a massive nuclear freeze movement. Challenged by Senator Paul Tsongas's assertion at one hearing that President Reagan's hard line risked forfeiting future agreements with Moscow, Secretary of State George Shultz famously responded, "So be it." The Reaganites incurred howls of derision from the foreign policy establishment for resisting a deal to remove U.S. and Soviet missiles from Europe and holding out instead for a "zero option" that would have required even greater Soviet reductions.

When the shouting was over, however, Reagan's hang-tough strategy had worked. It turned out that the key to a more peaceful world—and, indeed, to smaller nuclear arsenals—was not American flexibility but dramatic political change within the Soviet Union itself. Only after the Soviets, under Mikhail Gorbachev, truly changed their foreign policy, from one of hostility toward the West to one of accommodation, was serious arms control possible. Reagan got the "zero option" after all—and his successors got the large mutual reductions of START I (and may yet get START II, if the recalcitrant Russian Duma ever ratifies it).

We review this not-so-distant history to put today's supercharged debate over the recently rejected Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in a more sober perspective. While both parties are now exploiting the issue for electoral advantage and indulging in all the vitriol and hyperbole that entails, the fact is that both the Clinton administration's case for the treaty and the Republicans' case against it are flawed. Until we understand why, we won't be able to mount a sensible approach to the issue, which should include an effort by the next president to renegotiate the treaty and then resubmit it to a Senate that will hopefully have been better prepared to give its advice and consent than this one was by the lackadaisical Clintonites.

As the history of cold war arms control suggests, the essential flaw in the case for the CTBT has less to do with the (admittedly problematic) terms of the document itself than with the sweeping claims made for it by the administration and other advocates. The ostensible objective of the treaty is to discourage nuclear proliferation, on the theory that testing is a prerequisite for the development and deployment of nuclear arms. If states are bound not to test bombs, they won't be able to develop and deploy them and will be easier to impose sanctions upon if they try.

But, like the old Soviet Union, the rogue states (North Korea, Iraq, Iran, perhaps Libya) at which this argument is principally aimed are not dangerous because of the military technology they possess. They are dangerous because of the odious intentions of their governments, which lead them to seek such weaponry in the first place. Just as internal political change in the Soviet Union was the precondition for meaningful arms reductions as the cold war wound down, the internal transformation of these rogue states is a precondition for rendering them less of a threat to the United States and to the international community generally.

This point was proved, ironically, by the coup in Pakistan, an event that the administration immediately tried to invoke as proof of the horrible risks the world had been exposed to by the Senate's actions. In fact, one of the first actions of the new military government was to reassure India and seek an easing of tension between the two nuclear-armed states so as to concentrate on Pakistan's much more pressing economic troubles. Time will tell how sincere this move was. But it does at least illustrate that the nature of the Pakistani regime—a restless but essentially conventional and, hence, deterrable player in the international arena—is the critical factor in determining whether or not its weapons will ever be used.

Saddam Hussein—who hasn't even signed the CTBT, much less ratified it—doesn't answer to this description and never will. His entire record, like that of North Korea, also a nonratifier, raises the most serious questions as to whether international agreements can constrain his behavior at all. As for the possibility that the CTBT would legitimize the use of force against Iraq in case it breached the treaty, well, just look at the difficulty the United States has in mustering international support for punishing Iraq now, when it is in violation of the numerous legal obligations it has already assumed.

So, given its other weaknesses, especially in the area of verification, we're not deeply troubled at the prospect of losing the CTBT as a parchment club with which to beat Iraq and other rogues.

But we are deeply troubled by the spirit in which the Republican-dominated Senate undertook to defeat the treaty.

For the necessity of political transformation by America's enemies entails the vigorous engagement of the United States in foreign affairs. We need to make use of all instruments at our disposal to help bring about such change—ranging from, say, aid for the Iraqi opposition to U.N. resolutions (a reason why the payment of America's U.N. obligations is an urgent priority). And, if worse comes to worst, we will need to use military force, alone or in concert with others, to rein in the rogue states.

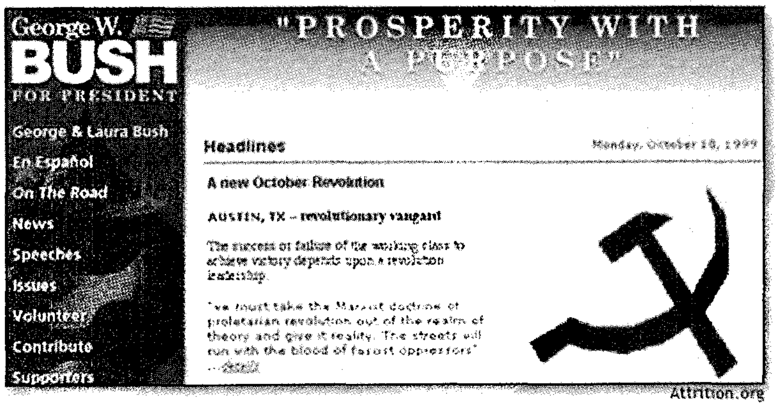
Yet the rejection of the CTBT was informed by an isolationist attitude that would turn its back on this kind of robust international role for America—an attitude that holds that nothing, not even the prevention of mass slaughter and instability in our traditional European sphere of interest, is worth fighting for, and that would have America retreat behind the illusory protection of our geographical isolation and a still-hypothetical ballistic missile shield. The defeat of the CTBT might make sense on its own terms, but not as part of a larger Republican program—whether crudely presented as "America First" or more nattily dressed as "realism"—that would result in the truncation of U.S. involvement in international institutions and international affairs.

The Democrats, having never conceded the lessons of Reagan's successful approach to the Soviet Union, seek to redeem the old liberal cold war wisdom that arms control treaties can secure international order almost by themselves. The Republicans, having either forgotten or consciously turned their backs on Reagan's legacy, make arguments that, no matter how much some in the GOP may deny it, imply that international disorder is so intractable that America's best bet is to stand down from the tough job of preserving a peaceful world and let others do it for us.

We insist that both the CTBT and America's foreign policy more generally can be rescued from these polarized but equally inadequate views. But it will probably be up to the next president to make that happen. ■

NOTEBOOK

FILE NOT FOUND: When George W. Bush began posting lists of his campaign contributors on the World Wide Web, he boasted to *The Dallas Morning News*, "I have always supported rapid public disclosure of campaign contributions as a healthy campaign finance reform." It's curious, then, that when the time came for Bush to send his latest contribution records to the Federal Election Commission (FEC) on October 15, as the law requires, he did not file those records electronically, as almost every other major candidate has been doing. Instead, he sent the FEC a paper record of contributions that was 3,766 pages long. (Four days later, the Bushies sent the commission an amended version that ran even longer: 4,581 pages.) The FEC must now hire a contractor to enter those records into the agency's database manually, a process that is not only laborious but, at 24 cents per individual filing, expensive, too. More important, it could be four to six weeks before the FEC can post a comprehensive, searchable index of contributors—thus allowing voters to sort through the mass of donor information and draw conclusions about which well-heeled interests have jumped on the Bush bandwagon. (This, by the way, is precisely the kind of useful information that is almost impossible to glean from Bush's website, which, to Bush's credit, lists names and contributions but, not to W.'s credit, still does not allow users to sort the list electronically.) Bush campaign officials insist that they really did want to send the FEC filings electronically, but "technical glitches in the software" prevented them from doing so. "We will do it next time," a Bush spokesperson assured a reporter from the Bureau of National Affairs' *Money & Politics Report*. FEC officials say the software worked just fine when the Bush campaign tried a dry run earlier in the week. Still, Bush staffers may deserve the benefit of the doubt on this one. Technology has been giving them fits lately, most memorably when hackers broke into the campaign website on October 19 and put a large hammer and sickle on the homepage. ■



Headlines

Monday, October 18, 1999

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Attack of the Cyber Gremlins.

Humanitarianism at century's end.

The Good Doctors

By DAVID RIEFF

THE AWARDING OF the 1999 Nobel Peace Prize to the humanitarian aid group Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), or Doctors Without Borders, was richly deserved. Founded in 1971 by a small group of young French doctors as an alternative to the Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), MSF has literally redefined humanitarian action over the past 30 years. Whereas the ICRC almost always insists that its success depends on well-nigh absolute discretion—a stance that, at its worst, led the group to keep silent about what it knew about the Nazi concentration camps—the founders of MSF have combined the Geneva committee's high level of medical competence with a willingness to bear witness publicly to the horrors their teams encounter on the ground.

From Afghanistan to Kosovo, the results of MSF's work have been extraordinary, not only in terms of lives saved and victims succored but also in harsh truths told. At the same time, MSF's example has also spawned a welter of other humanitarian groups and has transformed the way that already-existing groups operate in the field and conceive of humanitarian action. About the need for organizations such as MSF there can be no doubt. In an age of failed states, natural disasters exacerbated by environmental degradation and population pressure, and the transformation of war from largely an interstate phenomenon to largely an intrastate one, MSF slogan in the late '70s—"we have two billion people in our waiting room"—has proved to be anything but hype.

And yet the realities humanitarians face on the ground and the contradictions and ambiguities of humanitarian action that have become clear over the course of the past decade—above all to humanitarians themselves—should tinge the celebration of MSF's award with regret. There is something bitterly paradoxical about the fact that MSF has been "Nobelized" at the very moment that humanitarianism itself is in a profound crisis, with even its future viability very much in doubt. As Jean-Christophe Rufin, a former vice president of MSF, recently put it, "A sense of malaise pervades the world of humanitarianism. There is a languor, a sense of sadness, a strange feeling of failure."

The reasons for this are clear enough, and it is to the enormous credit of the humanitarian establishment (and in such stark contrast to the triumphalism and defensiveness of the human rights establishment, with which it is often associated) that, far from denying the difficulties it faces, it has insisted upon them repeatedly and publicly—at times to the point of overstatement. At the very least, too much was expected of humanitarianism, both by its practitioners and by the public at large that supported their efforts. It is now clear that humanitarianism cannot replace politics. Moreover, it has become apparent that, in extreme cases, humanitarian action can even mitigate certain horrors just enough to defuse pressure for some outside intervention that might bring those horrors to an end.

MSF as an institution deserves enormous credit for encouraging and leading the agonizing public debate about these developments. The group has always attracted activists who are also eloquent intellects. In their writings, figures such as Rufin, Rony Brauman, and Alain Destexhe have teased out the implications of what humanitarianism means when it is as much an emblem of failure as of success—and not just the specific political failure that any war or refugee crisis represents but a civilizational failure.

WHETHER THE NORWEGIAN Nobel Committee was aware of it or not, its decision to single out a humanitarian group is as much a recognition of the barbarism into which so much of the world seems to be sinking as a tribute to the courage and dedication of MSF. Indeed, the centrality that humanitarian action has enjoyed—in crises ranging from the Ethiopian famine of the mid-'80s through the siege of Sarajevo to the refugee crisis in eastern Congo in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide—is actually a demonstration of the collapse of international order. In the chaos of the post-cold-war era, where international institutions, great powers, and, indeed, neighboring states are either unable or unwilling to act, humanitarianism has increasingly served both as a sop to conscience and as a morally reassuring fig leaf, in this age of CNN, for that inaction.

The road ahead for MSF, and for other, like-minded humanitarian organizations, is anything but clear. The publicity humanitarian groups receive is a mixed blessing. It is good for fund-raising, but it can radically diminish fieldworkers' freedom of maneuver. Some older aid workers insist that they were more effective when they were less professionalized and more obscure. And, in an era when humanitarianism as an idea is being used as a flag of convenience for all sorts of agendas—sometimes great powers invoke it to justify military intervention, at other times they send in humanitarian groups after the slaughter has ended—some within MSF have even wondered whether the term "humanitarian" has not been so overused and distorted as to be morally incoherent and intellectually self-deceptive. They agonize about finding a way to do their work without providing governments with alibis for their own failures. And, at best, the answers they come up with are provisional and unsatisfactory.

In the best of all possible worlds, then, winning the Peace Prize would not only add legitimacy to the work MSF does in the field but also lead to an intensified debate over the limits, purposes, and risks of humanitarianism. While it's impossible to overstate the value of what MSF has achieved in the past, the group's next great accomplishment may be to rescue and redefine the ideal of humanitarianism itself. ■

Privacy on trial.

Indecent Exposure

By Jeffrey Rosen

The politics of privacy in America are reactive and sentimental, fired by heart-tugging anecdotes that capture the public imagination. The murder of TV actress Rebecca Schaeffer by an obsessive fan who obtained her address through the department of motor vehicles led Congress to pass the Driver's Privacy Protection Act, which forbids state licensing authorities from releasing the personal information of individuals without their consent. Stories of battery victims being solicited by chiropractors after direct marketers got their addresses from the arrest records of their abusers led California to prohibit police departments from disclosing the addresses of arrested individuals for commercial—but not journalistic or investigative—purposes. Unlike many European legislatures, however, Congress has refused to pass a comprehensive privacy law that declares, as a general principle, that personal information gathered for one purpose shouldn't be disclosed for another without the explicit consent of the individual concerned. In America, corporate opponents of broad privacy legislation have argued repeatedly, privacy should be legislated one step at a time.

Now some of the same corporate interests have banded together to argue before the Supreme Court that piecemeal privacy laws are unconstitutional because privacy must be legislated broadly or not at all. If the Court agrees, its decisions would threaten the ability of Congress to address threats to privacy on a case-by-case basis, which seems the only approach that is politically feasible in an emotional age.

The history of the Driver's Privacy Protection Act shows how debates over privacy tend to be distorted by maudlin sensationalism. The DPPA was promoted as an anti-stalking law after domestic violence advocates insisted that Schaeffer's death was a symptom of a nationwide epidemic of stalking, assault, and murder of women by those who got their home addresses from departments of motor vehicles. In fact, celebrity stalking, although unfortunate, represents an insignificant fraction of the invasions of privacy that result from the multimillion-dollar market in personal information sold by state agencies. After forcing individuals to reveal their social security numbers, addresses, and health information in exchange for a driver's license, greedy states have earned millions by selling the same information to commercial databases. (In the early '90s, New York state made $17 million each year from the information trade; Wisconsin made $8 million.) These databases, in turn, are one of the main sources for direct marketers, private investigators, and journalists who want to locate individuals against their will. If I want to track down someone in California, I can get his social security number and address from a database such as Autotrack. Armed with the number, I can then get his credit history and previous addresses, search for his neighbors, and, through them, find his friends and enemies.

In a legal system that respected the right to privacy, this shameless state traffic in personal information might itself be considered a constitutional violation. But the Supreme Court, over the past few decades, has held that the Fourth Amendment doesn't restrict the government's ability to search or seize private diaries, electronic papers, and computer files. The Court seems unlikely, therefore, to conceive of a state's forcible extraction and exposure of personal information as an unreasonable search or seizure.

This makes Congress's efforts to protect informational privacy especially important. But two of the four circuit courts that have considered the matter have struck down the DPPA as a violation of the Tenth Amendment, which protects states' rights. The Supreme Court has held that Congress can't "commandeer the legislative processes of the States by directly compelling them to enact and enforce a federal regulatory program"; and the Court invoked this principle in 1997 to strike down part of the Brady Bill, which required state law enforcement officials to perform background checks on prospective gun buyers. But, unlike the Brady Bill, the DPPA doesn't command state officials to enforce a federal regulatory program. As Judge Frank Easterbrook observed when he rejected the Tenth Amendment challenge in his powerful opinion for the U.S. Court of Appeals in Chicago: "The Driver's Privacy Protection Act affects states as owners of data, rather than as sovereigns." Instead of commanding the states to regulate private conduct or to enforce federal rights, in other words, Congress is simply ordering state information banks *not* to release information, in the same way that the Video Privacy Protection Act orders the corner Blockbuster Video outlet not to release video-rental records. Still, there is an ominously vague sentence in the Brady Bill case warning that Congress may not "direct the functioning of the state executive," which the states'-rights justices might invoke to strike down the DPPA.

The Supreme Court has also held that Congress has to act neutrally when it regulates the economic activities of the states and that it can't impose burdens on state agencies that it doesn't also impose on private market participants. This is supposed to discourage Congress from regulating the states without good reason; if forced to distribute economic burdens even-handedly between the public and private sectors, the theory goes, Congress will only act when it's willing to take the political heat. Opponents of the DPPA have urged the Supreme Court to extend this antidiscrimination principle into a general rule that Congress can't protect informational privacy without passing a comprehensive statute that regulates private and public databases at the same time. But Easterbrook rejected this argument, too: "Discrimination against the states is forbidden, but a nondiscriminatory system may take more than

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one law to implement," he wrote. If the Supreme Court disagrees, that would doom privacy legislation in practice. A comprehensive law would be nearly impossible to enact, and, if it were enacted, direct marketers might challenge it as an even greater intrusion on state sovereignty.

PRIVACY, IN THE abstract, has no political constituency; although people claim to support it in theory, they rarely object until their own privacy is violated in practice. At the oral argument before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, one of the appellate judges who voted to strike down the DPPA belittled its practical value. Why should people care about the release of their social security numbers? she asked. After all, her own social security number was clearly visible on her driver's license. But the judge wasn't compelled to wear the number tattooed on her forehead, and, if she were, she would feel invaded in the extreme.

Indeed, requiring social security numbers to be entirely public would subvert the promise of new digital technology, which makes it possible for citizens to reveal selective details of their identities without revealing their actual identities. Instead of forcing citizens to display their names, addresses, and health information on a laminated driver's license, state licensing authorities could issue digital certificates that store each piece of identifying information separately. I could use these certificates to tell a website that I'm over 18 years old, a police officer that I'm licensed to drive in Washington, D.C., or a gun store that I'm virtually blind without contact lenses, all without disclosing my name. My actual identity could be kept in escrow by the motor vehicles bureau and revealed to law enforcement only if I'm suspected of committing a serious crime. The disaggregation of identity is an exhilarating possibility in a world where we're often told that none of us can transcend the constraints of race, age, and gender or be judged by what we say rather than who we are. But the possibility of selective identification will be more difficult if state licensing authorities can't be legally compelled to keep ultimate identities and other personal information private.

The states'-rights argument is sufficiently weak that the Court may be persuaded to uphold the DPPA. But the constitutional objections to the California law—which forbids the state to reveal the addresses of arrested individuals for commercial but not for journalistic, political, or investigative purposes—are much stronger. The law was directed against the cottage industry of data banks that have been created to bombard people who have been arrested with direct-mail solicitations from bail-bond firms, lawyers, and therapists. In some states, these solicitations have indeed led to horror stories: in Maryland, for example, a lawyer who got a suspect's address from a data bank offered his services before the arrest warrant had been served, causing the suspect to flee before the police arrived. But is it rational to deny direct marketers addresses that are freely disclosed to journalists? The First Amendment, the Court has long held, doesn't allow states to discriminate against speakers based on the content of their speech. And, in light of new media technologies, it's increasingly hard to distinguish between *The Baltimore Sun*, which publishes the blocks where arrested crime suspects live, and an electronic newsletter that is targeted at the suspects themselves. As newspaper and magazine delivery in cyberspace is increasingly customized to reflect the preferences of individual readers, who may eventually be charged based on the items they download, the distinction between news gathering and reporting for commercial and noncommercial purposes is evaporating.

Defenders of the California law view it as a restriction on access to information, not as a restriction on speech. States should be free to restrict information to those who promise to use it for noncommercial purposes, the argument goes, in the same way that the National Endowment for the Arts should be free to restrict federal grants to artists it believes will serve the public interest. But for a state to discriminate among the recipients of information based on their promise to use it for tasteful rather than vulgar purposes raises the same troubling First Amendment questions as Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's efforts to discriminate among publicly funded museums in New York City based on their support of what he views as indecent art.

ANOTHER CASE THAT may be headed for the Supreme Court presents a more fundamental clash between the right to commercial speech and the right to privacy. At the end of August, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit struck down a federal rule requiring phone companies to seek customers' permission before using personal billing information—including when, where, and to whom they place calls—in order to target them with ads for unrelated communications services. Restricting AT&T from using billing information that customers voluntarily disclosed, the court held, violated the phone company's First Amendment rights. If this crude reasoning is embraced on a national level, it would become impossible for Congress to enact the very law that opponents of the DPPA insist is the only way of protecting privacy: forbidding businesses, as well as the government, from collecting information for one purpose and then disclosing it for another without the consent of the individual concerned.

The underlying question in all three of these invasion-of-privacy cases is more political than legal: What sort of information can plausibly be considered private even when it is disclosed for limited purposes? It's hard to see the addresses of arrested people in California as private information, especially when they are routinely disclosed to the newspapers and revealed to the world. But, in a civilized society, our telephone records and social security numbers should indeed be protected from global exposure, despite the fact that we're forced to disclose them to the department of motor vehicles or the phone company in order to function as citizens. If the courts refuse to let Congress make these contextual judgments on a case-by-case basis, there is, unfortunately, no political constituency that will clamor for the protection of privacy on a broader scale. Like clean air, privacy is a necessity that no one misses until it's too late. ■

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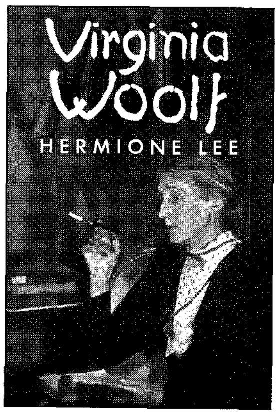
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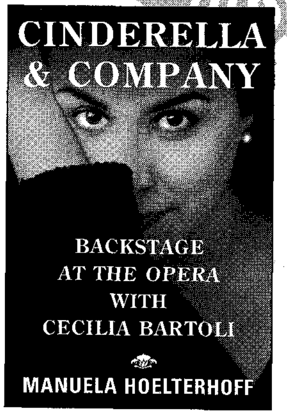
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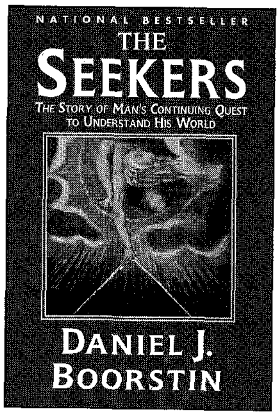
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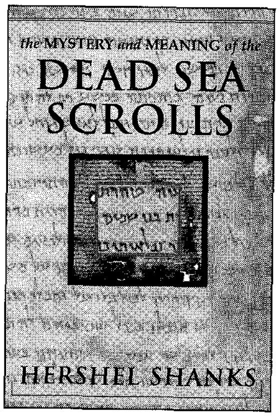
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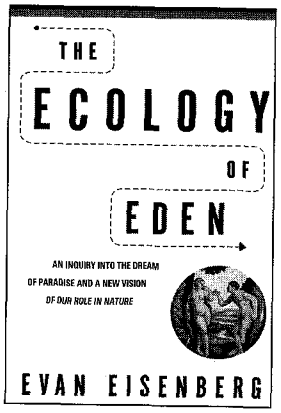
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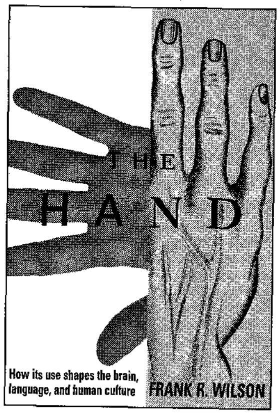
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VINTAGE

What the latest Hiss documents really reveal.

Open Secrets

By SAM TANENHAUS

I STILL HAVEN'T figured out how I got mixed up in a rather curious event staged in Washington, D.C., a few days ago. But the incident is a reminder of how our obsession with the revelation of all things previously "secret" has warped our understanding of historical truth.

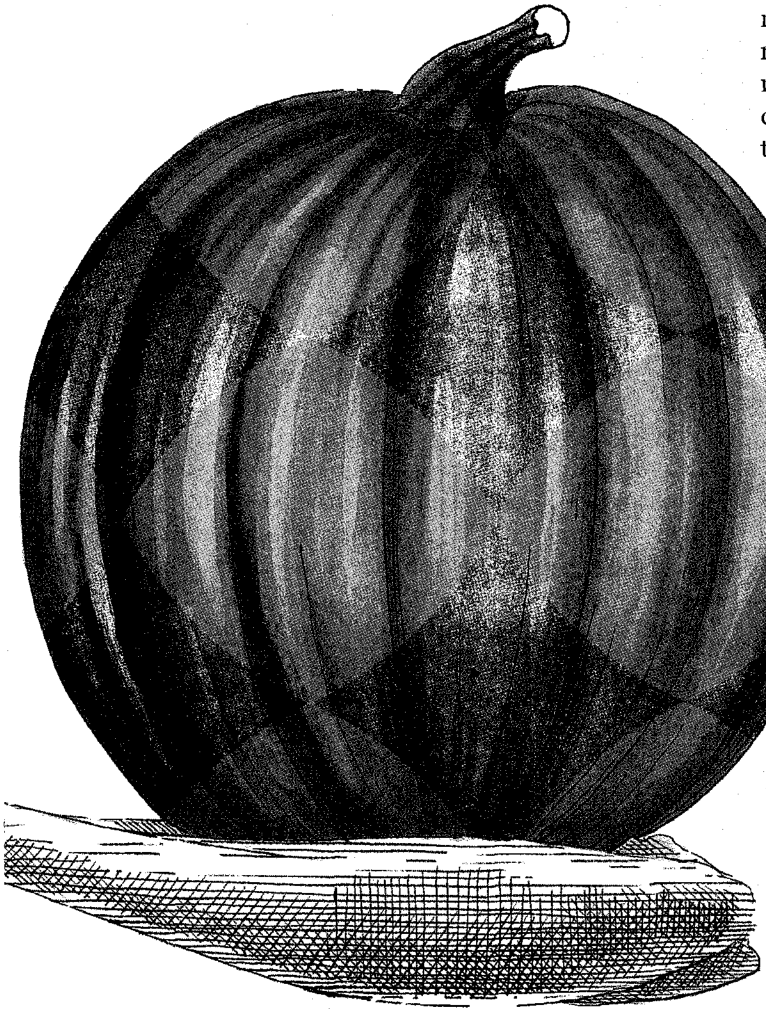
The occasion was the release of grand jury testimony taken during the Alger Hiss perjury trials in 1949-1950 but kept under lock and key for 50 years. A year ago, a group of historians backed by Public Citizen, Ralph Nader's group, sued to get access to these documents. Last spring a federal judge ruled in the historians' favor, arguing that the customary ban on grand jury testimony should be lifted in this case because the documents were of historical importance. After the government withdrew its appeal, more than 4,000 pages of documents suddenly became available for inspection. These included testimony by Hiss, Whittaker Chambers, and Richard Nixon, who had led the sensational hearings held by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in the summer of 1948.

Since I had supported the release of these documents, I agreed to examine a complete set of the transcripts—or as many pages as I could plow through in a weekend—and to join a panel at an October 12 press conference at Public Citizen's offices in Washington. There would be a general announcement followed by brief remarks from each panelist about what the documents contained. From my reading it was clear the material was of considerable interest, as it included testimony from witnesses, such as ex-Communist Elizabeth Bentley and accused spy Harry Dexter White, who had played vital roles in the Red-hunting dramas of the late '40s. Nixon's testimony to the grand jury was intriguing, too, because it offered verbatim remarks he had made at a moment of high political drama that happened also to be a pivotal moment of his career.

It was also clear, however, that the testimony shed no new light on the guilt or innocence of Hiss, a question settled long ago—he was guilty—on the basis of evidence produced at his two trials and confirmed by recent disclosures from Soviet archives. Moreover, the new documents covered ground familiar to anyone who has studied the case in detail. The

most significant portions of Chambers's testimony, for instance, had been entered into the record of Hiss's first trial, in 1949, and in any case reiterated statements Chambers had given in several other venues, including a wide-ranging deposition conducted by Hiss's lawyers. As for Hiss's testimony, he had written up detailed memos summarizing his appearances before the grand jury, and they are on file in Hiss's archive at Harvard Law School. And the most dramatic moment of the inquiry, an eleventh-hour appearance by Representative Nixon in which he brandished the celebrated "Pumpkin Papers" but defied the U.S. attorney's demand that he hand them over as evidence, had been reported at the time and in later accounts. In sum, the new documents add to our understanding of the atmospherics surrounding the case, but they have no bearing on the question of espionage.

Yet some of my fellow panelists, addressing a roomful of reporters and TV cameras, made broad and sensational claims. The historian Bruce Craig declared that Nixon's testimony to the grand jury was his "crowning achievement as an orator before his Checkers speech" and very possibly swayed the grand jury. Another panelist, Public Citizen Litigation Group Director David Vladeck, conjectured that, had the Hiss defense been allowed to read Nixon's testimony and to study an error Chambers had made in identifying one of his accomplices in the spy ring, the case might have been thrown out of court.


VINT LAWRENCE

These assertions ranged from the misleading to the fanciful. Nixon's testimony was not an oration. It was a clever piece of argument, classically Nixonian, in which he explained the jurisdictional reasons for not surrendering the microfilm to the grand jury even as he subtly reminded federal prosecutor Thomas Donegan that, if Hiss were not indicted, Nixon's HUAC committee would pursue its own investigation—as it was already doing anyway. But, aside from the particulars of Nixon's forensic maneuverings, nothing recorded in the transcript was previously unknown, and there is no evidence it had any discernible impact on the grand jury's decision to indict Hiss. On the contrary, in the interval between Nixon's appearance and the grand jury's vote two days later, the jurors considered issuing a formal reprimand of HUAC "for getting in the way of the Justice Department." Not only that; the presiding judge also hauled Nixon into his chambers and ordered him to have copies of the microfilm made for the grand jury. Finally, as Allen Weinstein wrote in *Perjury: The Hiss-Chambers Case*, the government prosecutor in the first Hiss trial "offered to place in evidence the entire grand jury transcript," but Hiss's lawyer declined.

Much of this—including Nixon's grand jury appearance—was reported in newspapers at the time and has been covered in subsequent accounts. But this did not inhibit my colleagues. And, in case anyone missed the point, the press conference culminated in an appearance by Tony Hiss, who read a statement averring that his father had maintained for many years that the transcripts "contained important information which would help him demonstrate both his innocence and patriotism and the cruel and bizarre unfairness of the case against him." The message was not lost. Opening *The Washington Post* the next day, I saw that comment repeated, along with Craig's effusion about Nixon's "crowning achievement." My demurrals were not reported at all.

At a time like this it is useful to recall the term "pseudo-event," which was coined by Daniel J. Boorstin in his book *The Image*. Writing in 1961, long before the advent of cable television and the Internet, Boorstin presciently described how modern technology had created a bottomless demand for information that had, in turn, transformed the role of journalists. They had ceased to be recorders of events and had instead become showmen and advance men whose task was to create the news or to spin it out for maximum effect. The reporter who failed to find an exciting actual story, said Boorstin, "must make one—by the questions he asks of public figures, by the surprising human interest he unfolds from some commonplace event, or by 'the news behind the news.'"

The pseudo-event, said Boorstin, typically has several characteristics. First, it is planned, rather than spontaneous; "not a train wreck or an earthquake, but an interview." Second, it is intended primarily to be disseminated

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SAM TANENHAUS, a contributing editor at *Vanity Fair*, is writing a biography of William F. Buckley Jr.

and discussed, to fill blank space or empty airtime: "The question, 'Is it real?' is less important than, 'Is it newsworthy?'" And, third, its meaning is tangled up with larger questions that the pseudo-event leaves intentionally unclear: "Did the statement really mean what it said? Without some of this ambiguity a pseudo-event cannot be very interesting."

THE HISS PRESS conference I attended is a striking example of the newest permutation of the pseudo-event. Call it the pseudo-revelation. No mere concoction of enterprising journalists, it originates instead with "experts" practiced at manipulating the press. They are able to do so because, in most cases, they possess legitimate artifacts, usually documents or tapes that are presented, and often solemnly received, as altering or even reversing our understanding of major events and figures.

Pseudo-revelations are the natural, perhaps inevitable, outgrowth of our particular historical moment, which has seen important data grudgingly yielded up by strongholds of secrecy such as the CIA, the National Security Agency, and the KGB. But the phenomenon seems equally rooted in something else: a deep and widespread cynicism about politics and about democracy itself. It is glaringly on display in backstairs books, such as those written by Bob Woodward and Seymour Hersh, that brush aside questions of policy and open debate, promising to tell us what "really"—that is, secretly—goes on at the highest levels of government.

In the world of the pseudo-revelation, secrecy itself attains the sanctity of truth, even though in most instances the "new" disclosure isn't new at all or, at best, adds a thin layer of detail to what is already well-known. Consider the rash of presidential tapes published with great fanfare over the past year or two: White House conversations on the Cuban missile crisis or earthy phone dialogues featuring Lyndon Johnson and Jacqueline Kennedy. Are these documents useful? Of course, as long as they are read against the context of the larger events they illuminate—and as long as they are really illuminating.

But, all too often, the mystique of secrecy itself takes over and becomes its own news. For instance, earlier this month more than 445 hours of conversations secretly recorded by Nixon in 1971 were released. The most titillating remarks are those in which he is heard crudely equating Communists with Jews. "The only two non-Jews in the Communist conspiracy were Chambers and Hiss," Nixon told an aide. "Many felt that Hiss was [Jewish]. He could have been a half, but he was not by religion. The only two non-Jews. Every other one was a Jew."

The first thing to note is that, setting aside its absurd hyperbole, Nixon's comment was not wholly inaccurate; it reflects the indisputable fact, much discussed at the time of the Red hunts (and lamented by many Jews), that a disproportionate number of American Communists *were* Jews. Indeed, the anomalous resumes of Chambers and Hiss, middle-class WASPS who attended Ivy League schools and rose high in the professional world, partly accounted for the attention the two received when they seized center stage in 1948.

The second point is that Nixon's habit of making ethnic slurs, sometimes of the crudest sort, is hardly news. Remember the White House transcripts? In his biography of Henry Kissinger, published back in 1992, Walter Isaacson wrote that Nixon commonly referred to Kissinger as "my Jew boy" and complained, à la Pat Buchanan, that "Jews formed a powerful cohesive group in American society" and were "dangerous adversaries" because of "their control of the media."

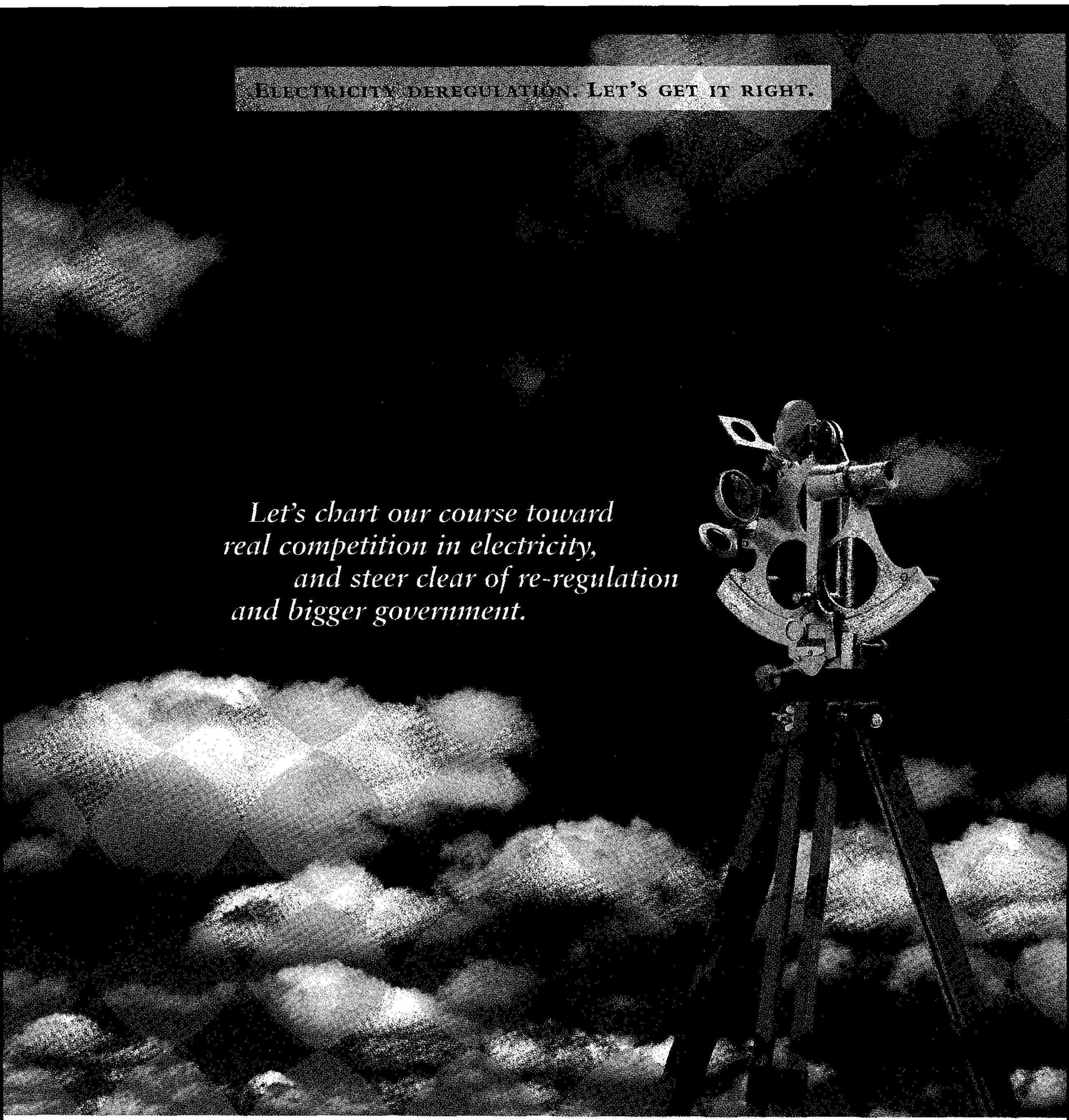
And yet these latest mutterings are presumed to be significant simply because they exist on tape. "NIXON IS HEARD BLAMING JEWS FOR COMMUNIST PLOTS," reads the headline in *The New York Times*. There is always room for a fresh pseudo-revelation, especially if it comes from a secret tape. The secrecy itself—and the fun of being let in on it—is the news.

BUT, OF COURSE, only one question really matters: How did Nixon's private attitudes toward Jews influence his policy? The answer: not at all. This is not surprising. As Isaacson points out, Nixon's "top staff included such trusted Jews as Kissinger, Arthur Burns, William Safire, and Leonard Garment." It is impossible to imagine these men serving an administration that enacted anti-Semitic policies. It is far easier to imagine them putting up with Nixon's boorish grumblings even as he authorized arms shipments to Israel at a critical moment of the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

The same is true of Nixon's attitudes a quarter-century earlier. Whatever his private beliefs about Jews and Communists, Nixon the HUAC investigator exhibited no hint of ethnic prejudice. It was his fair-mindedness, in fact, that impressed observers at the time, particularly in contrast with his senior colleague John Rankin, the Mississippi Dixiecrat who gloried in his anti-Semitism and racism and used his HUAC platform to espouse them.

But, in our age, with its fixation on secrecy, the public act or statement is given less weight than the private one. The result is a distortion of what politics is all about. Consider the case of another presidential vulgarian, Harry Truman. Even in the White House, Truman freely uttered the ugly epithets he had learned while growing up in Missouri. "Privately, he could still speak of 'niggers,' as if that were the way one naturally referred to blacks," wrote David McCullough in his biography *Truman*. But this was the same Truman who convened the Civil Rights Commission and ordered an end to segregation in military units. Truman also left behind recordings of his private conversations; it's a wonder that his achievements, too, haven't disappeared beneath the weight of pseudo-revelations about his "true" feelings on race.

Something strange has happened to political and historical inquiry. We have created a version of politics as a demimonde in which truth is secret, always hidden behind a facade of lies and in which only the hidden or the clandestine can be believed. And yet the foundation of politics has always been public acts, not private words. Our elected leaders, for all their many shortcomings, are not mob bosses who operate behind illegal "fronts," their every deed a masquerade or "cover" for some secret design. The pseudo-revelation is the gossip of politics. And it implies a cynicism as deep as, or deeper than, any exhibited by our elected leaders, including Richard Nixon. ■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From the Golden Spike to Moore's Law.

Digital Immortal

By ROBERT W. LUCKY

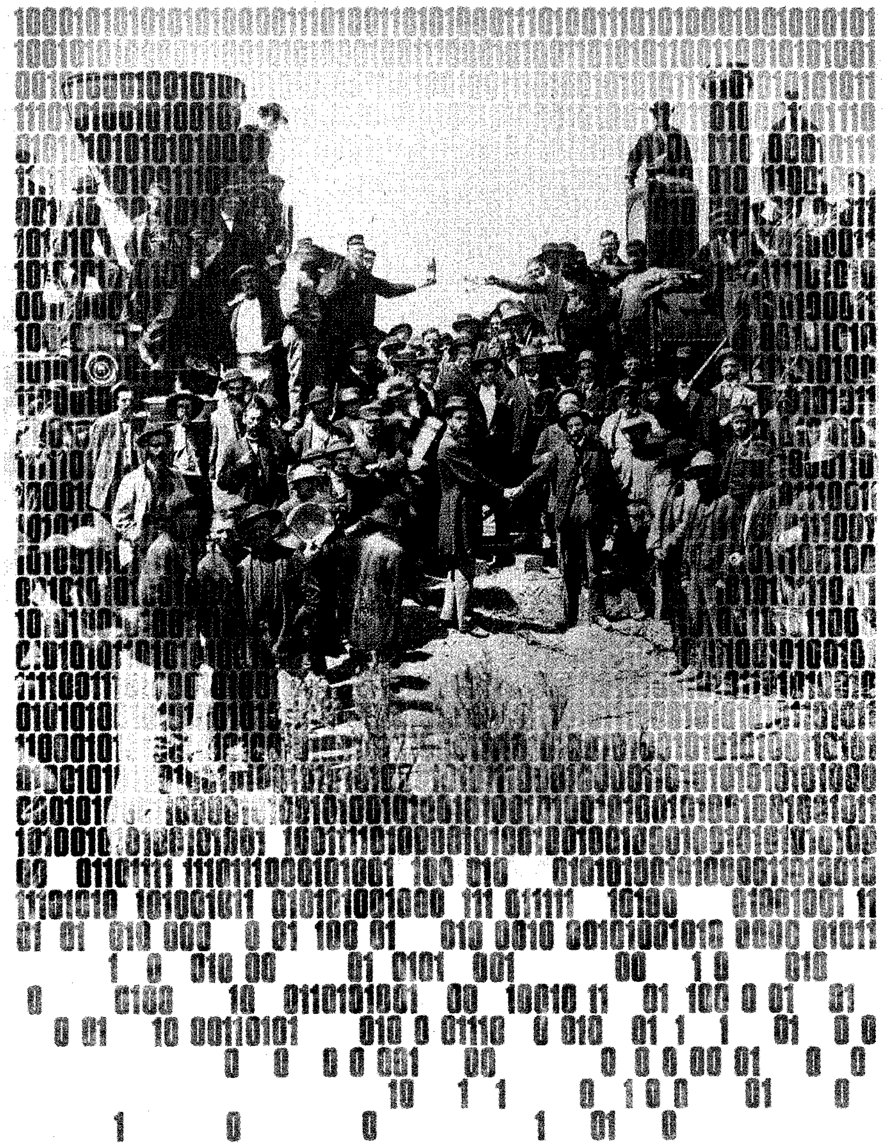
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY APPEARS to be the most powerful force shaping society today. It's hard to imagine a world in which all those computers could disappear or fade into insignificance. Yet, if history is any guide, all such technologies have a way of losing their dominance.

In the last century it was the railroads that shaped the nation. Promontory Point, an unremarkable spot northwest of Ogden, Utah, was long ago the setting for one of the most celebrated events in American history. It was there, at 12:47 p.m. on May 10, 1869, that the "Golden Spike" was driven home, connecting the Union Pacific Railway with the Central Pacific Railway to complete the last link of the transcontinental railroad system. If television had existed then, perhaps this event would have been covered with the same justified excitement that surrounded Neil Armstrong's first step on the moon. But, of course, there was no television, and instead the news was relayed to the waiting nation via the communications network of that day: the telegraph.

The ceremonial spike and hammer had been wired such that, when the hammer struck the spike, the "sound" would be immediately conveyed over the telegraph, which had completed its own transcontinental wiring years earlier. However, both Governor Leland Stanford of California and Thomas Durant of the Union Pacific missed the spike when they swung the hammer. Nonetheless, the telegraph operator dutifully entered the message by hand, keying in three dots that signaled the single word "done."

Twenty-five years earlier Samuel Morse had sent his famous message, "What hath God wrought?" from the Capitol in Washington, D.C., to Mount Clare depot in Baltimore, Maryland, thus commencing what was then considered the greatest information revolution ever. By the time the railways were joined, Western Union already had more than 50,000 miles of cable and poles and was, by the standards of that time, an economic giant. The electrification of the nation was just beginning. It would be another ten years before the electrical light would be invented, and still another year before the first New York City street would be illuminated. In seven years, the telephone would be invented. The three great infrastructures—electrical power, communications, and transportation—were in their infancy then, but they were fertile with promise.

The railroad of that day had a transformative effect on industry that was similar to the effect we now ascribe to information technology. Commerce, which had been oriented north-south because of rivers and canals, rotated to run east-west. Chicago, which had only 30,000 residents in 1850, became the railway capital of the nation and tripled its population in both that decade and the next. The radius of economic viability for wheat—the point at which the cost of transportation equaled the value of the wheat—expanded from 300 miles to 3,000 miles. If the concept of the "global village" had existed in that day, people would have said globalization was happening because of the railways.



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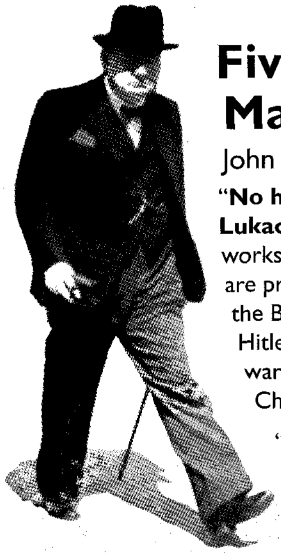
ROBERT W. LUCKY is vice president of Telcordia Technologies, which produces software and consults for telecommunications companies.



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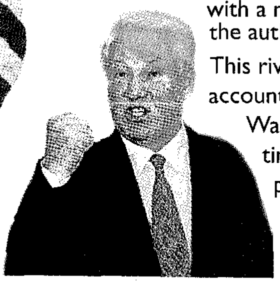

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Today the transformative power of the railways is a thing of the distant past. Promontory Point no longer seems as if it were ever a crucial place. The Golden Spike itself was "undriven" as part of the war effort in 1942. Transcontinental railways have diminished in importance, and many have ceased operation. The telegraph has disappeared, too, and today it's all about information technology—the force that will rewrite the rules of commerce, collapse the worlds of time and space, reinvent governments, and irrevocably change the sociology of the peoples of Earth. That, of course, is what we say now. The question is whether this importance is transient or whether information technology is so fundamentally different from what has come before it that its power will last into the next millennium.

I asked a number of influential friends in the information technology business whether they thought that the current technology was fundamentally different from the transforming technologies of previous centuries. Everyone said that of course it was, and some implied that it was sacrilegious even to raise the question. The conviction held by almost everyone in the field is that we're on to something that will change the world paradigm—not just for now but for a long time into the future, and in ways that none of us is able to forecast.

So WHAT IS different? Most importantly, information technology seems almost infinitely expandable, since it is not bound by the physical laws of the universe that have constrained previous technologies. The problem with those railways was the intrinsic limitation of the technology. I imagine going back in time to Promontory Point in 1869 to talk to people about the future of the railroad. People would tell me how wonderful and long-lasting the power of the railroad would be. Yes, I would agree, the railway would reshape the nation. It would be the dominant economic force for many years to come. But, I would say, look at that train. A century from now, it would be pretty much the same. A hundred years of progress would perhaps triple the speed of the fastest trains. The strongest engines would be able to pull more cars, and there would be anywhere from ten to a hundred times as much track mileage, but that's it. What you see is basically what you get. There isn't anything else.

I would also think to myself that, in a few decades, Ford would start building little compartments that propelled themselves without the need for tracks. Before long the Wright brothers would start testing contraptions that flew through the air. The flying things wouldn't be called winged trains, because they would seem different enough from the railway to deserve their own name. The nation would become webbed with highways and clogged with traffic, and the skies would be filled with giant flying compartments. All these inventions would constitute a steady improvement in the speed, convenience, and cost-effectiveness of transportation. Still, transportation wouldn't have improved all that much. Even today, looking at a lumbering Boeing 747 lifting its huge bulk into the welcoming sky, I wonder: How much better can transportation get? What comes after the airplane?

On the other hand, if the people of 1869 asked me about the future of the telegraph, I would shake my head in perplexity. A good idea, I would say, but far, far ahead of its proper time. The telegraph was digital, and the quality of being digital would be one of the three synergistic concepts that would constitute information technology. By itself, however, the telegraph could not be self-sustaining. What would be needed, and would not be available for another century, would be the other two concepts—the supporting technology of microelectronics and the overriding metaphysical idea of an information economy.

THE TELEGRAPH, OF course, was undone by the telephone, invented by Alexander Graham Bell only seven years after the Golden Spike was driven. His invention was basically the idea of analog—that is, the transmitted voltage should be proportional to the air pressure from speech. In that era, this was the right principle to follow. After all, the world we experience appears to be analog. Things such as time and distance and quantities such as voltages and sound pressures seem to be continuous in value, whereas the idea of bits—ones and zeros, or dots and dashes—is an artificial creation, seemingly unrepresentative of reality.

For more than a century thereafter, the wires that marched across the nation would be connected to telephones, and the transmission of the spoken information would be analog. Not until the late '50s would communication engineers begin to understand the intrinsic power of digital. An analog wave experiences and accumulates imperfections from the distortions and noise it encounters on its journey, and the wave is like Humpty-Dumpty—all the king's horses and all the king's men cannot put it back together again. The notion of perfection does not exist.

Bits, in contrast, have an inherent model of perfection—they can only be ones and zeros. Because of this constraint, they can be restored or regenerated whenever they deviate from these singular values. Bits are perfect and forever, whereas analog is messy and transient. The audio compact disc is a good example. You can play a disc for years and years, and every time it is played it will sound exactly the same. You can even draw a knife across it without hearing a single resultant hiccup in the sound—in most cases, all of the bits corrupted by the cut will be restored by digital error-correcting codes. By contrast, the old vinyl long-playing records sounded wonderful when they were first played, but they deteriorated continuously thereafter. And don't try that trick with the knife!

The underlying notion of the perfection of digital makes much of information technology possible. Pictures can be altered, sound can be processed, and information can be manipulated endlessly without fear of corrupting it. Nature sets the perfect example in life itself—the instructions for replication are transmitted in the four-letter digital code of DNA. At this fundamental level we find the indestructibility of digits, without which life could not be propagated and sustained.

Is digital here to stay? Or could a budding young Alexander Graham Bell came up with some invention that convinces us to go back to analog? While there are compelling reasons why digital is a foundation of the information age, it

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is also true that digital implementation perfectly complements the microelectronics technology that is the building block of choice today. This is a stretch, but I suppose I could imagine microelectronics being replaced in the future by quantum devices or biological computers that were intrinsically analog. People might say, "Remember when computers only gave you a single answer, as if everything were crystal clear, and they didn't realize that life is fuzzy and full of uncertainty?" I suppose it's possible, but I don't think so. I think digital is here to stay.

THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION started before microelectronics had been developed, but it is hard to imagine that it would have gotten very far without the integrated circuit. The first digital computer, ENIAC, was built from vacuum tubes in 1946 at the University of Pennsylvania, nearly at the same time that the transistor was being invented at Bell Labs. But digital computers were unwieldy monsters, and during the 1950s it was analog computers that achieved popularity among scientists and engineers. Then in 1958 a young engineer named Jack Kilby joined Texas Instruments in Dallas. Being new to the company, he was not entitled to the vacation that everyone else took during the company shutdown that year. Working alone in the laboratory, he fabricated the first integrated circuit, combining several transistors on a single substrate, and thus began a remarkable march of progress in microelectronics that today reaches astronomical proportions.

The integrated circuit is now such an everyday miracle that we take it for granted. I can remember when portable radios used to proclaim, "Seven Transistors!" in big letters, as if this made them much better than their mere six-transistor imitators. Today you would never see an ad stating that a computer featured a microprocessor with, say, ten million transistors. Nobody cares. But I watch that number grow like the number of hamburgers McDonald's sells, because it is the fuel of the digital revolution. If it were to stop growing, ominous things would happen.

In 1965 Gordon Moore, a founder of Intel Corporation, made the observation that the feature sizes (the width of the wires and sizes of the device structures) in microelectronics circuitry were shrinking at an exponential rate. In other words, we were learning how to make transistors smaller and smaller at a rate akin to that of compound interest. Integrated circuits were doubling their cost-effectiveness every 18 months. Every year and a half, for the same cost, we could produce chips that had twice as many transistors. This came to be known as Moore's Law, and for nearly 35 years it has remained almost exactly correct.

Moore's Law is the furnace in the basement of the information revolution. It burns hotter and hotter, churning out digital processing power at an ever-increasing rate. Computers get more powerful, they continue to increase in complexity, and time scales get shorter—all consequences of this irresistible march of technology. Railroad technology had nothing similar. Perhaps no equivalent technology force has ever existed previously.

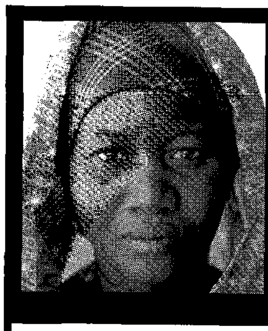
That the power of digital electronics can increase exponentially is difficult for most people to comprehend. We all tend to think in linear terms—everything becomes a straight line. The idea of doubling upon doubling upon doubling is fundamental to what has happened in electronics, but it is intuitive neither to engineers and scientists nor to decision-makers in boardrooms. To envision it, think of the old story about the king, the peasant, and the chessboard. In this fable the peasant has done a favor for the king and is asked what he would like for a reward. The peasant says that he wishes simply to be given a single grain of rice on the first square of his chessboard, and then twice as many grains on each succeeding square. Since this sounds simple, the king agrees.

How much rice does this require? I discovered that one university bases a physics experiment on this fable to help students gain an intuitive understanding of exponentiation. The students are given rice and a chessboard to see for themselves how quickly exponentials can increase. They discover that, for the first few squares, very little rice is required. The first 18 to 20 squares of the board can be handled easily using the amount of rice contained in a small wastebasket. The next couple of squares need a large wastebasket of rice. Squares 23 through 27 require an area of rice about the size of a large lecture table. Squares 28 through 37 take up about a room's worth of rice. Filling the last square—the sixty-fourth—requires a number of grains represented by the number one followed by 19 zeros—variously estimated at requiring the entire area of the earth to produce, weighing 100 billion tons, and filling one million large ships or one billion swimming pools.

This is the way exponentials work. At first they may be small, but later they grow overwhelmingly large. Moore's Law states that there will be exponential progress in microelectronics and that doublings will occur every year and a half. Since the invention of the transistor there have been about 34 of the 18-month doublings of the technology as predicted by Moore—the first half of the chessboard. If this law continues, what overwhelming implications await us now, as we begin the second half of the board? Or, as was suggested by a recent story in *The New York Times*, based on an article by an Intel researcher in the journal *Science*, will we soon reach the physical upper limit on such growth?

MOORE'S LAW IS an incredible phenomenon. Why has it worked so well? After all, it is not a true natural law in the sense that the laws of physics are, nor is it a logical axiom that has been derived mathematically from basic principles. It is merely an observation of progress—an observation, however, that has been an accurate predictor for nearly 35 years. In spite of the fact that this law is the most important technological and economic phenomenon of our time, there is no accepted explanation for its validity.

Gordon Moore himself has suggested that his law is simply a self-fulfilling prophecy. Since every competing company in the industry "knows" how much progress is required to keep pace, they each pour all necessary resources into the pursuit of the growth Moore's Law mandates. This has required an ever-increasing investment, as the cost of fabrication plants



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necessary to produce smaller and smaller circuitry has escalated continuously to more than a billion dollars per facility. Whatever the reason behind Moore's Law, it is more likely to lie in the domains of economics or sociology than in provable mathematics or physics.

Aside from the enigma of why Moore's Law exists at all, there is the puzzling question of why the period of doubling is 18 months. This rate of progress seems to be critically balanced on the knife-edge of just the amount of technological disruption our society can tolerate. I sometimes think that Moore's 18 months is akin to the Hubble constant for the expansion of the universe. Just as astronomers worry about the ultimate fate of the universe—whether it will collapse or expand indefinitely—so should engineers and economists worry about the fate of Moore's expansion constant. Suppose, for example, that Moore's Law ran much faster, so that doublings occurred every six months. Or suppose it were much slower. What would happen if the phenomenon described by Moore's Law suddenly stopped, as that *Times* article so unsettlingly suggested it is about to do?

WE'VE GROWN SO accustomed to the steady progression of cheaper, faster, and better electronics that this rate of development has become standard. We know that, when we buy a computer, it will be obsolete in about two years. We know this computer will be worthless and that even charities won't accept it. We know that new software may not run on our old machine, whose memory capacity will be insufficient for most new purposes. We know that new accessories and add-on cards that can't be used with our old machine will be created. We know this, but we accept it as a consequence of the accelerating pace of information technology.

One very good reason why the 18-month doubling period has not been disruptive is a principle of economics that helps counterbalance the chaos implied by the Moore's Law upheavals—it is the principle of increasing returns, or the idea of demand-side economies of scale. In other words, the more people who share an application, the greater its value to each user. If you have your own individual word processor that produces files incompatible with anyone else's system, it has very little value. If the operating system you use is owned by few other people, you will have difficulty buying software for it. For this reason, the information technology market often has the characteristic of "locking in" certain popular products, such as Microsoft Word or the PC platform.

The good news is that the economic imperative of increasing returns forces standards and common platforms that survive the turmoil of Moore's Law. The bad news is that it is often hard to develop new products and services that lie outside the current framework. For example, the Internet today has been characterized as a collection of old protocols that survive essentially unchanged from their original design (created about 30 years ago) and are now running on new machines that Moore's Law has made continuously more powerful. We can't change the protocols because the cost and disruption to the Internet's hundred million users would be enormous.

Now imagine a world in which Moore's Law speeds up. The computer you bought would be obsolete before you got it hooked up. No PC or Apple standard platform would exist, because the industry would be in constant turmoil. Every piece of commercial software would be specific to an individual processor, and people would search at flea markets for software suitable for the computers they had bought only a few months earlier. Chaos would abound.

But suppose instead that Moore's Law simply runs out of gas. Suppose we reach the limits of microelectronics, where quantum effects limit the ability to make circuits any smaller. What would the world of information technology look like? Perhaps computers would be like toasters, keeping the same functionality over decades. Competition between computer manufacturers would be mainly in terms of style, color, and brand. Maybe you would be able to buy a mahogany computer to match your living-room decor. Used computers would retain their value, and programs would remain constant over the years. Intel, Microsoft, and other bastions of the technology market sector would have to find new business models.

COULD IT HAPPEN? Could computers stop getting better? As you ponder that recent report in the *Times*, remember that many other scientific papers have been written over the past two decades predicting the end of Moore's Law because of the constraints imposed by various physical laws. So far they have all been wrong. Every time the technology has approached a physical limit, a way around that limit has been devised. However, the latest such papers do seem more and more credible as the size of circuits descends into the world of quantum mechanics and atomic distances. While there is somewhat of a consensus that Moore's Law could continue for another decade, that consensus wavers as further doublings become more and more problematic. Remember the fable about the rice and the chessboard and the awesome consequences of unlimited exponential growth. Surely there is a limit, and it may not be very far away. The likelihood is not so much that Moore's Law would stop completely but that it would begin to slow down.

Even as we approach possible physical limits on the technology, however, there is a huge industry that will resist the slowing of technological growth with all of its collective strength. The beat must go on, somehow, some way. Material systems other than silicon that promise smaller circuit sizes are being explored. Some researchers are betting on quantum or biological computing. Meanwhile, research on the algorithms that process information continues unabated on its own Moore's Law curve. In a number of important areas, such as image compression, more progress has been made through mathematical ingenuity than through the brute-force application of faster computing.

Going forward, however, the greatest potential for continuing improvement lies in networking and distributed computing. Today two parallel developments are taking shape: the evolution toward higher-speed networks and the invasion of a myriad of embedded, invisible, and connected

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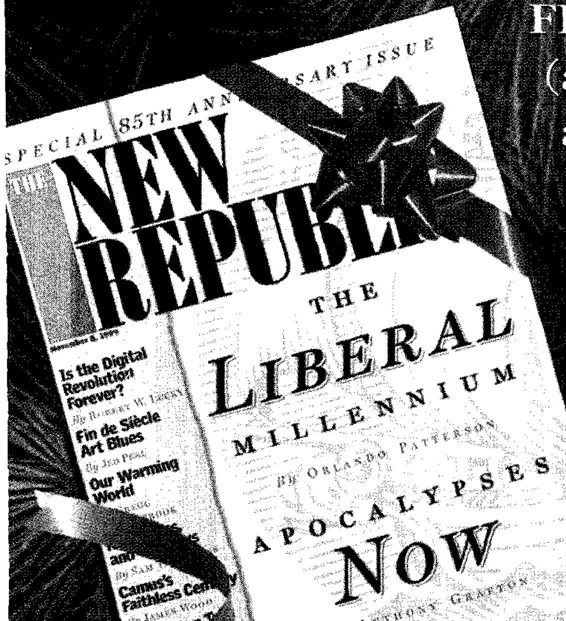
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computers. In networking we know that it is possible to increase the capacity of optical fibers a thousandfold, which will result in a veritable sea of capacity at the heart of the Internet. Technical obstacles to high-speed access to this sea are starting to be overcome, driven by a plethora of competing alternatives that include cable, telephone, wireless, and satellite. Within a few years, megabit access will be common, followed shortly by access to tens of megabits at each home. In the sea beyond, a kind of distributed intelligence may take shape.

At the periphery of the network, tiny, inexpensive devices with wireless Internet connectivity are likely to cover the earth. It is possible that every appliance, every light switch, every thermostat, every automobile will be networked. Everything will be connected to everything else. Networked cameras and sensors will be everywhere. The military will develop intelligent cockroach-like devices that crawl under doors to watch and listen. The likelihood exists that everything will be seen and known. We may well approach what author David Brin has called the transparent society.

Because of these trends, it is probable that, a couple of decades from now, the computer as we know it today—an isolated, complex steel box requiring hour upon hour of frustrating maintenance on the part of its user—will be a collector's item. Instead we will all be embedded in a grid of seamless computing. We may even be unaware of its existence. People will look at computers in museums or in old movies and remark how quaint such times must have been. Unlike the railway, which, centuries later, still retains the form and function of the original model, computers will have undergone a metamorphosis into a contiguous invisible utility. They will have moved into a new existence entirely. Hopefully, they will take us with them.

AFTER DIGITAL AND the infrastructure of microelectronics, the third aspect of the current evolution is the idea of an information economy. Personally, I never cease to be amazed by how this new economy functions. When I was a youth the only adults I saw working were carpenters building new houses on my suburban street and farm workers in the nearby fields. I came to believe that was what adults did—they made things and they grew things. One day, as an adult myself, I came to the sudden realization that I did not know a single person who made or grew anything. Everyone I knew had a rather mysterious job in which he or she moved information or money around. Some had grown very wealthy doing these nebulous things. Sometimes I am wryly amused by this information economy. I myself am so far removed from any physical contribution to society that I have a sense of unreality about what I do for a living. How do we get away with it? We have all moved into the land of bits, leaving mostly machines to be our caretakers in the land of atoms.

The image of the Golden Spike being struck, enabling heavy, fire-breathing engines to clatter over iron tracks, seems to epitomize the old world of atoms. Recently I waited on a railroad platform in a small Japanese city. I saw in the distance an express bullet train approaching the station. The speck quietly grew larger until suddenly, with a sound almost like a sonic boom, it burst through the small station. The earth shook beneath my feet, and the vacuum and shock when the train passed left me breathless. What awesome, visceral power! But this is the world of atoms, and it is bound by the limits of the physical world—by energy and mass, by the strength of materials, and by the depletion of natural resources. The world of bits, in contrast, seems to glide by in ethereal serenity.

Information in itself weighs nothing, occupies no space, and abides by no physical law other than—possibly—the speed of light. Unlike physical goods, information can be given away yet simultaneously retained. It can also be copied perfectly at nearly zero cost. It can be created from nothing, it consumes no natural resources, and, once created, it is virtually indestructible. We are still trying to cope with the ways these properties clash with our traditional laws and business models in industries such as publishing and music.

In *Augustine's Laws*, the clever book by Norman Augustine, former chairman of Lockheed Martin Corporation, the author observed that new airplanes increased in cost by a factor of four every ten years and that the fraction of each airplane's weight allocated to electronics was also increasing rapidly. He pointed out that, if this trend continued, the engineers would need to find a new substance to add to airplanes that was enormously expensive yet weightless. Fortunately, such a substance was found: it was called software. Thereafter, the cost of planes could increase indefinitely without regard to their lift capacity.

Having escaped the bounds of physical laws, information technology can continue to expand in unforeseen directions. The World Wide Web came as a surprise to nearly everyone in the business, even though it appears obvious in retrospect. It was a great social invention based on old, available technology. In fact, nearly all the progress made today in the Internet world is based upon new business models and sociological change rather than on technology. I often hear the expression, "Technology isn't the problem." According to some people, we have enough already to last for a long time to come.

WHAT COMES AFTER the information age? I have no idea. But, as I walk the halls of industry, passing by cubicle after cubicle containing roboticized humans staring at CRT screens, I think that this can't last. This strange amalgam of human, screen, keyboard, and mouse must surely be a passing phenomenon. Perhaps in three or four decades one of my grandchildren will be able to say, "I don't know a single person who deals with information." Maybe then people will deal only with meta-information, or policy. Maybe we will rise above the land of bits into the land of ideas and dreams. Whatever there is, it will surely be different. But, because information technology has escaped the bounds of physical limitations, because it is supported by microelectronics that have been powered by the compound interest of Moore's Law, and because of the lasting beauty of digital, I'm betting that it will endure in some form through the next century. ■

When All Else Fails:

Controlled Access To Heroin Makes Sense

This June, for the second time in three years, the people of Switzerland voted to make heroin available to addicts who have been unsuccessful in treatment and with methadone.

Why?

An independent review of the Swiss heroin program published by the World Health Organization* found:

- **Participants in the heroin maintenance program reduced criminal activity by over 50%.**
- **The percentage of participants in the heroin maintenance program holding a job rose from 14% to 32%.**
- **The percentage of participants in the heroin maintenance program who were homeless dropped from 12% to 1%.**
- **There were significant drops in the use of illegal drugs reported, including heroin, cocaine, marijuana and benzodiazepines.**
- **There was no diversion of prescribed heroin to the illegal street market.**
- **There were no overdoses from heroin prescribed by the program.**

Less crime, less illegal drugs, improved health, higher employment and less homelessness! Prescription heroin makes sense when abstinence and methadone treatment fail.

Common Sense for Drug Policy, Kevin B. Zeese, President
703-354-5694, 703-354-5695 (fax), info@csdp.org, www.csdp.org

Robert Ali et al, "Report of the External Panel on the Evaluation of the Swiss Scientific Studies of Medically Prescribed Narcotics to Drug Addicts," The World Health Organization, April 1999.

The real evidence for the greenhouse effect.

Warming Up

By Gregg Easterbrook

It got dry, and that must be the influence of global warming. Wait—then there were downpours, which proved the greenhouse effect. A monster hurricane crossed North Carolina; global warming must be the cause. No, wait—out comes a book about the most deadly hurricane in U.S. history, which hit in 1900, long before there was greenhouse gas buildup. Snowfall has decreased some in recent years, and that must prove global warming. But wait—when cities were snowed in during the winter of 1996–1997, commentators blamed greenhouse disruption. Annual temperatures have been high during the '90s, so the world must be warming. But wait—when winters were frigid during the 1970s, there were congressional hearings on whether an ice age was beginning. It's hot, it's cold, it's dry, it's wet—and don't get us started on El Niño.

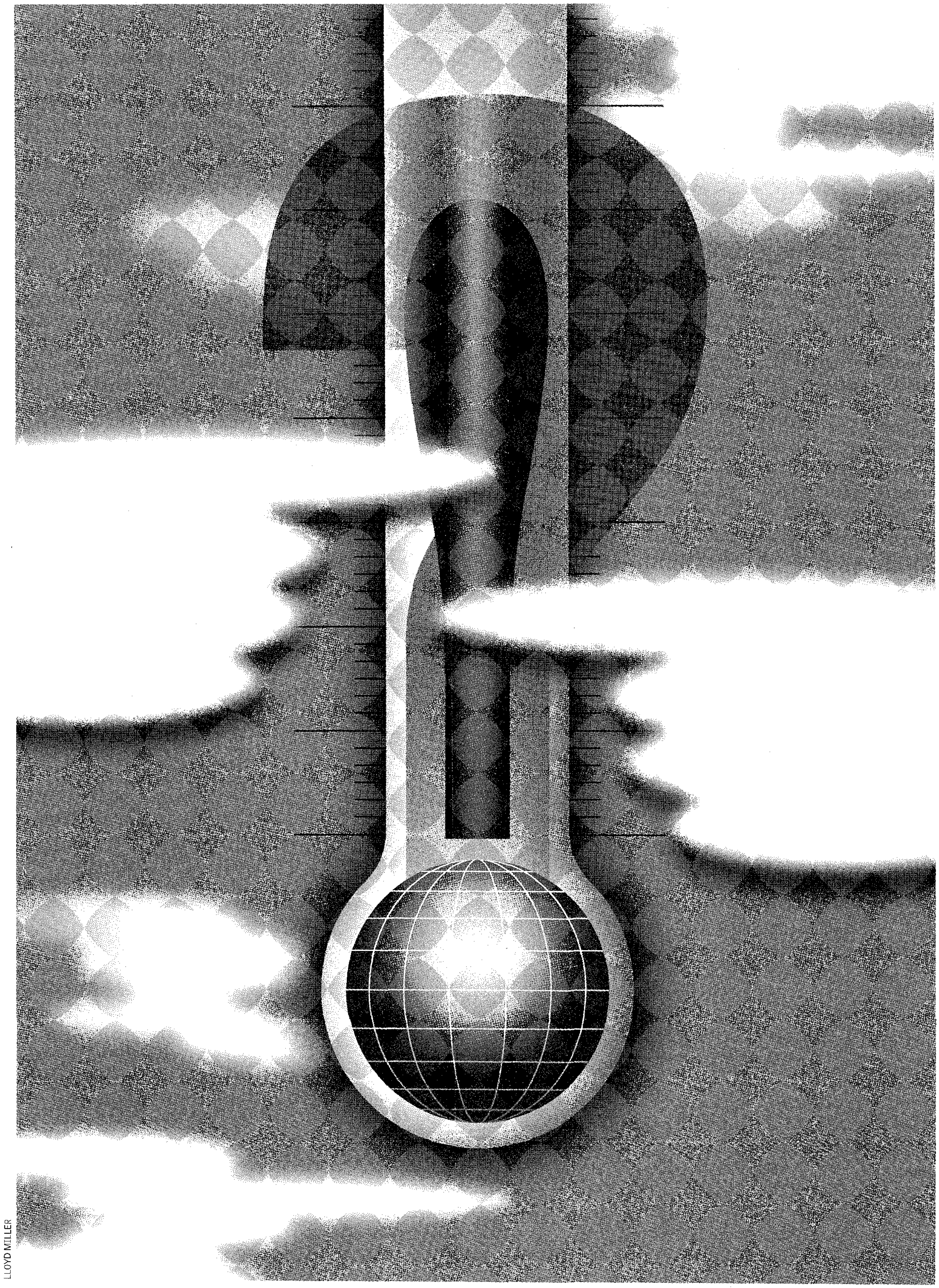
As cable TV channels and extended local newscasts increasingly fill airtime by reporting weather details—and even the national networks send their reporters to hurricane areas to scrunch up inside designer slickers and shout, "I think I just felt a raindrop!"—the notion has taken hold that every barometric fluctuation must demonstrate climate change. This anecdotal case for global warming is mostly nonsense, driven by nescience of a basic point, from statistics and probability, that the weather is always weird somewhere. But, even as public attention has fixated on greenhouse claims by anecdote, the less dramatic, technical case for climate change has been gradually strengthening. Artificial warming is far from proven, but today the scientific evidence is stronger than it was five years ago. Most research suggests that a warmer world now seems probable; that altered climate patterns may be in store; that the chance of truly dangerous global warming, though still low, is rising. The worst aspect of attributing every dry spell or cloudburst to the greenhouse effect may be that such reasoning obscures the real concern: that credible signs of climate change are in fact beginning to appear.

One reason there is so much flummery in the global warming debate is that the weather in the Northeast United States, where the opinion-makers live, has a disproportionate effect on whether greenhouse concerns are taken seriously. During the summer of 1999, most of the Northeast experienced a drought; and, between July and September, *The New York Times*' op-ed page ran no fewer than four articles asserting that an artificial greenhouse effect was now proven, in part by dehydration. Then autumn brought drenching rains to the Eastern seaboard. The phase of wetness combined with the phase of dryness to make it an average year for precipitation, the apparent portent having "washed out," in statistician lingo, into normality. This did not prevent commentators from switching to a claim that showers proved global warming. "Go outside: try to understand that the sun beating down, the rain pouring down, the wind blowing by are all human artifacts. We don't live on the planet we were born on," one *Times* op-ed declared. Perhaps one shouldn't speak for all *Times* contributors, but I live on the planet I was born on, and feel it can be said without fear of contradiction that the sun is not a "human artifact."

Because weather is short-term and expected to vary, using it to draw conclusions about climate is treacherous. Weather is what happens today; climate is what happens during your lifetime. It is climate, not weather, that society needs to care about. In recent years, whenever a record high temperature is set, it has been common to hear global warming invoked as the reason. But record temperatures, high or low, are statistical "outliers," or nonstandard effects, that rarely reveal anything. The highest temperature ever recorded in the United States was in the year 1913, long before greenhouse gas accumulation began. Europe's record high occurred in 1881, Australia's in 1889, South America's in 1905, Africa's in 1922.

Hurricane incidence, currently spoken of as disturbingly high, is also inconclusive as an omen of climate change. Distribution of what the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) calls "major landfalling hurricanes" is basically equal before and after greenhouse gases, with the 1910s and '20s having about the same number of major Atlantic cyclones as the 1980s and '90s. A devastating hurricane, Andrew, struck in 1992, and an abnormally large hurricane, Floyd, arrived this year. But the strongest U.S. hurricane ever was in 1935. Hurricanes became a media obsession in the mid-'90s, when there were two consecutive above-average years for such storms. But those years stood out mainly because most of the period from 1964 to 1994 was below the historic average; commentators had forgotten how frequently hurricanes can occur.

Tornadoes are currently on a frightening upswing: there were more of them in the fourth quarter of 1998 than during any previous quarter in the nation's history, while January 1999 saw the most U.S. tornadoes ever in a single month. This is a somber concern for those who live in tornado zones, but does it suggest global warming? Greenhouse effect theory calls for warming mainly in high latitudes, which should reduce the poles-to-equator temperature gradients that



LLOYD MILLER

power storm formation; a greenhouse world might have less violent weather. Charts of tornado incidence in the postwar period show 1998 and 1999 spiking up out of nowhere, not representing any slow-building trend; what's happening may be a harbinger, or it may be random variation.

THIS SUMMER A strain of encephalitis was detected in New York City, and, being close to the media's oxygen, it occasioned one *Times* writer to opine that greenhouse-triggered "outbreaks" of plague-like proportions are "descending on us." If so, our bodies are choosing a funny way to show it: by getting healthier. Though the World Health Organization has cautioned that climate change could cause the spread of some diseases, mainly by extending the range of tropical contagion, no such effect has manifested itself in public health data. As greenhouse gases accumulate, rates for almost all diseases are declining almost everywhere in the world, with the tragic exception of AIDS in Africa. (There is evidence that ocean-temperature changes relate to disease incidence among marine mammals.)

Another popular assertion regarding global warming is that rising insurance claims from weather-related damage show that dire news is afoot. The National Environmental Trust, now running greenhouse effect ads asserting that "the weather has been pretty weird," claims that "severe weather events have cost $272 billion in damages in the '90s." Never mind that the National Climatic Data Center (NCDC) puts the figure at $170 billion; maybe somebody has been inflating claims to the insurance adjusters. The NCDC figure represents an enormous tab and a historic high. But ever-rising insurance claims might be expected in an affluent society where property grows steadily more valuable and a leading construction trend has been building high-end housing in coastal areas, the places most susceptible to storm damage.

The most dubious assertion made about global warming is that it must be happening because computers think so. Several scientific centers around the world now run "general circulation models" (GCMs). These computers, which are important research tools, simulate the atmosphere, and every GCM predicts a warmer future. But the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a U.N.-sponsored scientists' organization that is the leading player in the study of the greenhouse effect and is generally toward the left of the debate, issues regular warnings that GCMs are, at best, approximations. Computational power, even that of advanced supercomputers, is still too modest to recreate a system as complicated as global climate; greenhouse GCMs can't yet take into account basic considerations, such as the role of clouds.

Right now, one GCM, at the Goddard Institute for Space Studies, is predicting that a rapid global temperature rise will occur during the next decade; other GCMs are predicting more gradual effects. Overall, as GCMs have improved, the warming they predict has tended to decline. The IPCC's current "best estimate" is that, if existing trends in greenhouse emissions continue, the world will warm by approximately another 3.5 degrees Fahrenheit by about the year 2100—a significant and possibly dangerous figure, but one-third lower than the organization's estimate of a decade ago.

There is near-unanimous scientific agreement that the world has gotten warmer by about one degree Fahrenheit during the twentieth century. Worldwide, the decade of the '90s was warm, with seven of the past ten years showing above-average global temperatures. Are these findings the ones that prove global warming?

Being a long-term movement, the one-degree twentieth-century rise clearly tells us something. The problem is that we don't know what, because it is not yet known what caused the increase. Greenhouse gases from fossil fuels? Ocean-current shifts? Fluctuation in the output of the sun? Your guess is as good as the next Ph.D.'s. "There is a scientific consensus that the greenhouse effect is a serious concern, but not on much else. We are in the early days of understanding the global climate," says Michael Schlesinger, a professor of atmospheric sciences at the University of Illinois. Key puzzling datum: Roughly half of this century's warming occurred *before* 1940, when artificial greenhouse gas levels were not significant.

Only slight increases in mean global temperature are what caused the '90s to be the warmest decade "on record," and slight warming may be natural variation. Moreover, the whole notion of "on record" is a bit misleading. Precise temperature data go back only about 100 years, to the late nineteenth century. At that time, the climate was recovering from the Little Ice Age, which lasted from about 1500 to about 1850. Since the "on record" period begins at a point when the earth was somewhat cool, perhaps a warming trend is no surprise. The doomsday cohort often declares that, during the '90s, temperatures were warmer than at any other time in the past 100,000 years. But no one really knows; the IPCC says that "[d]ata prior to 1400 are too sparse to allow the reliable estimation of global mean temperature."

The IPCC repeatedly cautions that there is no scientific answer for what has caused the mild warming observed in this century. All we can be sure of, the organization says, is that human activity now plays some role in climate. Combustion of fossil fuels is not the sole concern. Deforestation, mainly in the developing world, has become a greenhouse influence. Some human activity is positive in climate terms: high-yield agriculture and managed forestry subtract vast volumes of greenhouse gases from the air by accelerating crop and tree growth. On balance, however, the IPCC suggests, society now influences climate in ways that won't be to our liking. Global climate has consistently been favorable to agriculture during the dramatic twentieth-century population increase. If human action now risks disturbing a climate favorable to humans, that may be all we need know to take greenhouse emissions seriously as a policy concern.

ADDED TO THE general likelihood that human activity now plays a role in climate are two research findings of considerable power. One, by Thomas Karl, head of the NCDC, shows that, over the long term, incidence of heavy rain is increasing. At the turn of the century, about eight percent of U.S. annual precipitation occurred during

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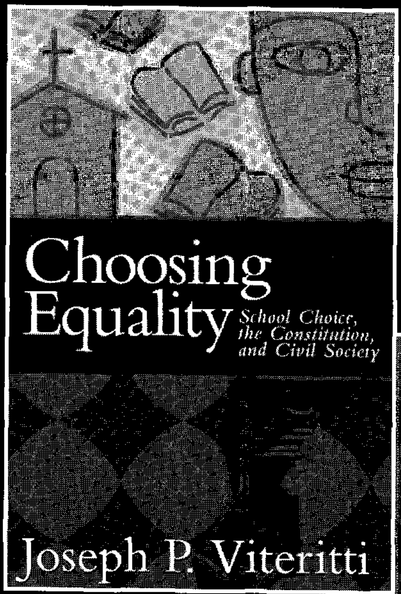

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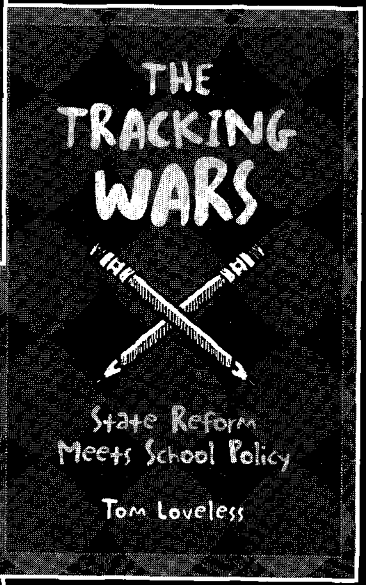

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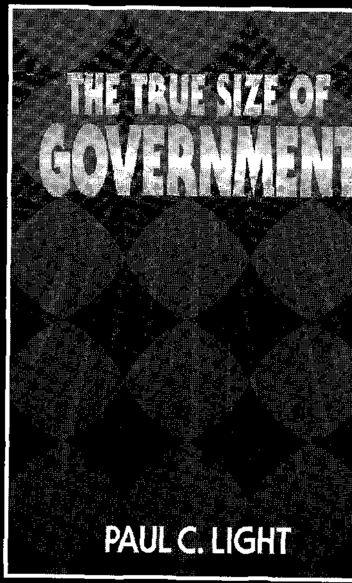

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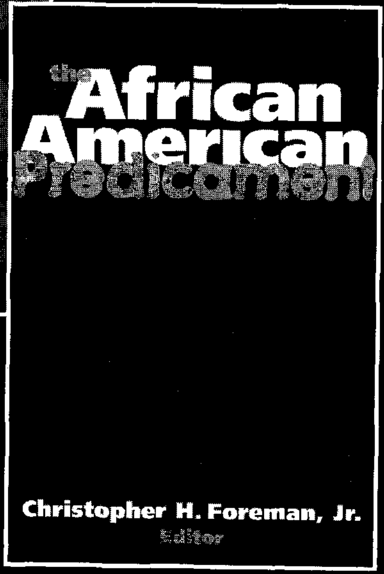

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downpours, and now ten percent does; this is not striking as a percentage, but it is a long-term distinction that may mean more than individual temperature spikes. A decade ago Karl ranked among the most important greenhouse effect skeptics, often pointing out how poorly global warming computer predictions squared with observed climate. In recent years Karl has become a greenhouse moderate, as observational evidence begins to strengthen.

A second important research finding is that the "frost-free" season in the United States is now eleven days longer than it was in the 1950s. This trend, too, is long-term and thus more likely to be significant. Ellen Cooter and Sharon LeDuc, researchers at NOAA, have found that, in recent decades, spring, as reckoned by the night of the last hard freeze, has been arriving one day earlier every three years.

Of course, most people want spring to come earlier, and the longer the frost-free season is, the happier farmers are. The mild warming of this century surely contributed to the postwar global flowering of agriculture, which has staved off widely predicted Malthusian catastrophes. Research shows that the warming that has occurred so far has come mainly in the form of less-cold nighttime lows in winter, rather than hotter daytime highs in summer; less-cold winter nights are a boon, moderating energy demand. The fear is that an artificial greenhouse effect will not follow its current course. In the rainfall and early-spring studies may reside a warning that changing climate patterns may begin to harm agriculture—for instance, by shifting precipitation away from currently tilled regions. Higher summertime daylight maximums may eventually be in store, scorching crops and increasing energy demand. There could be nasty surprises no one currently projects.

The downpour and early-spring findings are not conclusive but are sufficiently worrisome; they seem to be part of the reason Republican presidential candidate George W. Bush recently said, "I believe there is global warming." New patterns of rain and frost might have artificial causes, natural causes, or some combination of the two. Artificial causes are the only ones we can do anything about.

INCREASING SCIENTIFIC INDICATION of climate change has not led to policy action, in part because the global warming debate continues to be conducted as a partisan extravaganza, one in which participants of all stripes are sometimes most interested in name-calling and fund-raising. Anamorphosis rules. Alarmists make a point of citing the IPCC's scary upper-bound projection of a six-degree future warming, rather than the number the organization favors—its "best estimate" of about half that amount. Naysayers harp on the literalist point that, because climate dynamics are poorly understood, it is impossible to be certain how artificial greenhouse gases interact with their natural counterparts. But common sense tells us that billions of tons of compounds added to the air must have *some* effect.

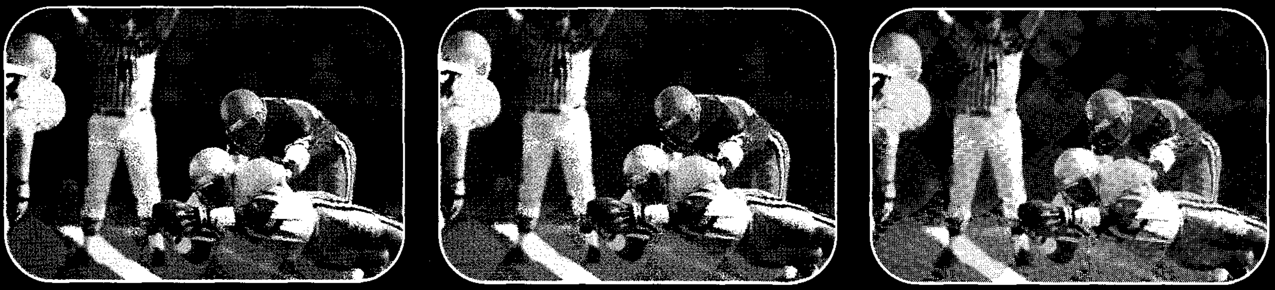
At its most frivolous, the greenhouse debate is dragged down by a sort of "science lite." The George C. Marshall Institute in Washington publishes anti-greenhouse-effect studies designed to resemble mainstream scientific research but closer in content to editorial writing. One prominent greenhouse Calamity Jane is Michael Oppenheimer of the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), identified in *New York Times* quotes as a "scientist" despite the fact that he has no academic affiliation and is a full-time employee of an advocacy organization with a fund-raising interest in greenhouse alarm. A decade ago, Oppenheimer wrote that, by now, the greenhouse effect could cause a catastrophic global drought that would destroy the U.S. economy and create dust storms so severe that highways would become impassable. Oppenheimer holds the EDF's Barbra Streisand Global Atmospheric Change Chair, which somehow never turns up in his *Times* identification.

There's a certain amusement value in watching the doomsayers and the naysayers slug it out, but the overwrought views that tend to dominate global warming debate divert attention from the fact that middle-ground compromises are possible. The Pew Center on Global Climate Change, a middle-ground group funded by the Philadelphia philanthropy, has signed up American Electric Power, Boeing, BP Amoco, DuPont, Lockheed Martin, Maytag, Pacific Gas and Electric, Shell, Sunoco, Toyota, Weyerhaeuser, Whirlpool, and other major corporations in a coalition that accepts the need for greenhouse action and advocates moderate policy steps; this list even includes a few oil companies. Some corporate members of the Pew Center have already committed to reducing greenhouse emissions in advance of any law to that effect. It is the views of centrists such as those at the Pew Center, not the fandangos on the extremes, that ought to be drawing the attention of the media and the policy world.

IF MODERATE POLICY steps are now justified, what should they be? Figures on the green left have called for such drastic actions as an immediate one-half reduction in global greenhouse emissions, which would be possible only by prohibiting whole categories of present activity—automobile ownership, for instance. Figures on the brown right have suggested that even judicious progress against greenhouse gases would have ruinous economic consequences. Middle-ground responses are possible, however.

The most important centrist point is that greenhouse gas reductions should be sought via energy efficiency. Energy efficiency not only pays for itself in the long run by moderating fuel demand, but research into new forms of clean energy will aid the process of preparing the United States for the post-petroleum economy that must come regardless of whether global temperatures go up or down. Between 1973 and 1986, when oil prices were a national concern, U.S. energy consumption did not increase, while the GNP grew by one-third; this indicates that it is entirely possible to use fossil fuels more efficiently without economic sacrifice. But, in recent years, U.S. energy efficiency gains have stopped. The sport utility vehicle fad is the most obvious reason—this year, overall fuel economy of new vehicles fell to its lowest level in 20 years. Lack of progress on energy efficiency not only leads to avoidable greenhouse

60% of U.S. Metro Areas Will Not Be Allowed to Have Color TV



Think that would cause an uproar?

But consider this: 60% of U.S. metro areas don't have direct access to the high-speed Internet backbone. And that is true.

The difference between *high-speed* Internet connections and regular connections? Much more than the difference between color TV and black and white.

Small towns and even good-sized cities like Shreveport, Sioux Falls, Scranton, Charleston and dozens more don't have direct access to high-speed Internet backbones.

And without it, businesses in those cities could be forced to move to where there is high-speed Internet access. The next great "dot.com" business will create jobs... somewhere else.

Yet some people in Washington still want to prevent America's phone companies from building high-speed networks to connect these areas to the Web.

Legislation in Congress will fix this by permitting phone companies to build high-speed Internet connections.

Let *everybody* build high-speed connections to the Internet.

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gases, it also sustains demand for imported oil, which is not in the U.S. security interest. A renewed commitment to advanced energy technology would both restrain greenhouse gases and be bad news for OPEC, which seems a desirable combination.

The most direct way to encourage clean-energy innovation would be to tax emissions of carbon dioxide and methane, the chief greenhouse gases. Classical economics generally prefers pollution taxes to complicated regulatory schemes in which government imposes specific technical standards—if you're just being taxed, it's up to you to set your own priorities, deciding for yourself, say, whether to switch from an SUV to a family sedan that gets more miles per gallon. Economists, including Martin Feldstein, chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors during the Reagan administration, have said they support greenhouse reduction via revenue-neutral fossil-fuel taxes, meaning carbon charges coupled with dollar-for-dollar reductions in other taxes. In 1997, a group that included six Nobel Prize-winning economists signed a statement saying that moderate reductions in greenhouse gases could be achieved in this fashion without causing economic harm.

AN EXAMPLE OF a successful market-based approach to pollution control comes from the acid rain trading program, enacted in 1990 under President Bush. The program instructed power utilities to reduce acid rain but allowed them to trade emission rights. When the law was passed, rights for a ton of acid rain emissions were expected to sell for about $1,500 each. Instead, today the permits sell for about $90 each, saving billions of dollars annually in control costs, while national acid rain levels are declining more rapidly than expected. When the program was established, the high estimated price of progress was based on control technology available at the time. As soon as they were given a financial incentive to devise anti-pollution ideas, utilities proved highly adept at discovering new, affordable ways to cut emissions. Granting companies the right to trade emissions permits made acid rain reduction a business opportunity rather than a burden. This program creates reason to hope that moderate greenhouse gas reductions could be achieved by a similarly successful initiative—ideally, by a revenue-neutral carbon tax with a trading program.

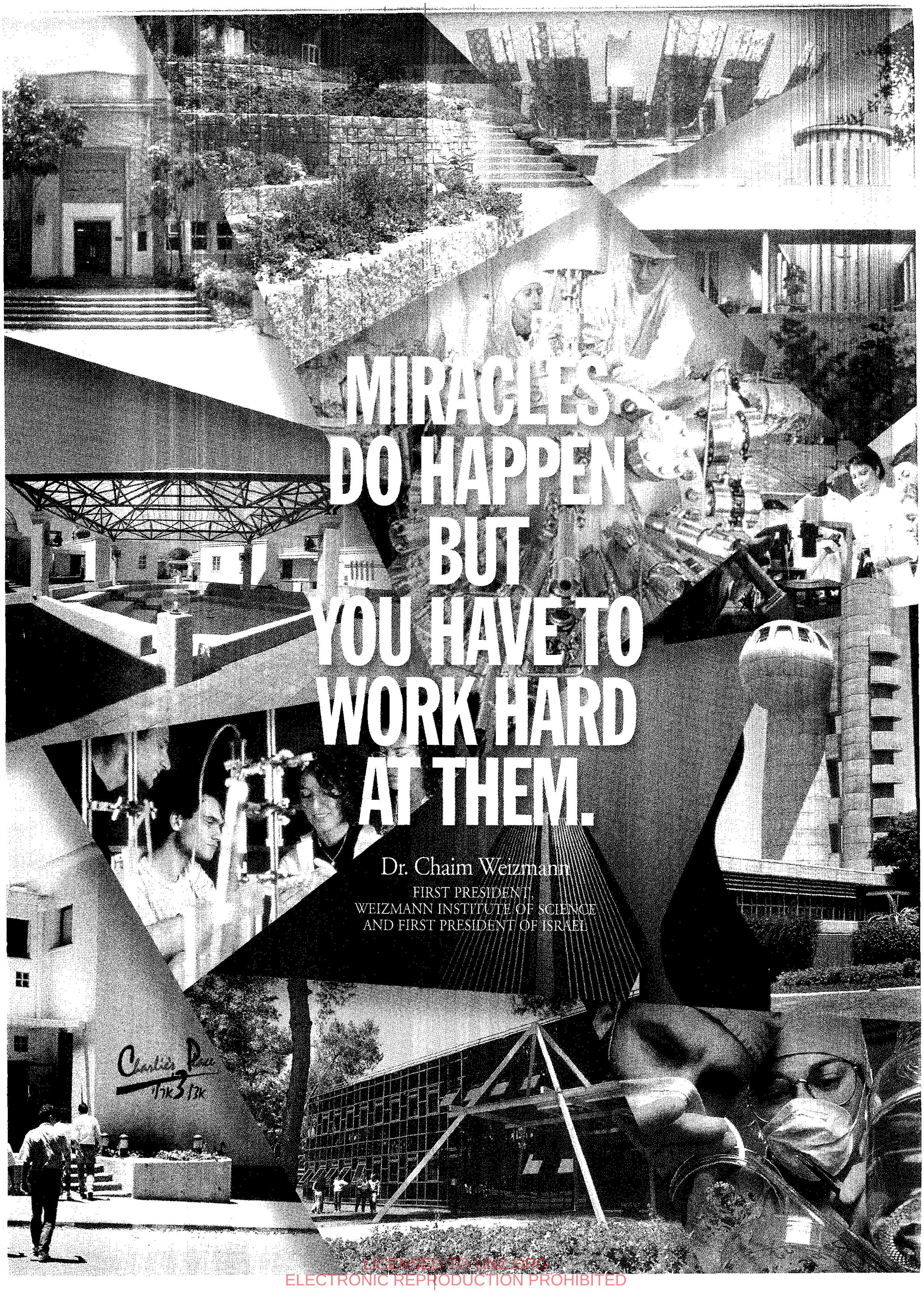
Resources for the Future (RFF), the centrist Washington think tank that designed and championed the acid rain emissions trading program, has now thrown its weight behind a similar approach to global warming reform. In the RFF proposal, rights to carbon emissions would be traded at $25 a ton, which initially would translate, for consumers, into about six cents per gallon of gasoline. Carbon trading would stay at this level until Congress was satisfied that the system was working, at which point the carbon charge would begin to rise annually. Polls show that a majority of Americans say they would pay somewhat more for gasoline in order to combat greenhouse gases; if other taxes were reduced in the process, the program might be politically realistic. What RFF proposes is what some economists call "shaping" a market—create a situation in which a needed innovation will be rewarded and then see what the market comes up with. "The market is not inspiring greenhouse gas control because there is presently no way anyone can buy the benefits of preventing climate change," notes Kenneth Arrow, a Nobel-winning economist. Moderately priced carbon trading could change that equation.

It might also trigger new energy technology that would create the next great economic boom category. John Browne, CEO of BP Amoco, has called it realistic to think that, by the year 2050, half the world's energy could be supplied by nonpolluting, renewable sources. Calculations show that much of the country's energy needs could be supplied by solar-electric conversion, using technology that is now working at the laboratory level and is not terribly far from applied use. Full-sized cars powered by zero-emissions "fuel cells" could realize the equivalent of 100 miles per gallon and are not far off: Chrysler, Ford, Toyota, and Mercedes-Benz are all working on practical fuel-cell cars. Robert Socolow, a professor of engineering at Princeton University, notes that it is even becoming technologically realistic to "decarbonize" fossil fuels, using them with little or no greenhouse emissions.

CONVERTING TO CLEANER and more efficient energy will entail huge capital costs and take many years. Because of this, "you don't lose much by moving slowly, compared to what you can gain if technology and programs are used wisely," notes Robert Stavins, a resource economist at Harvard University. Global warming is a long-term problem: if it is real, it will develop across decades, while any fix will require decades to reach its full effect. Rushing headlong into sweeping, binding programs, on the other hand, might disrupt prosperity.

The University of Illinois's Schlesinger, who conducts climate research and also writes policy analysis in conjunction with the RAND Corporation, has for years been advocating an "adaptive" greenhouse response—enact mild restrictions, watch to determine whether they inspire innovation, track the science to see if it gets stronger, and then adjust future policies based on whatever is learned. This thinking is right for global warming because, Schlesinger says, "we don't know what energy innovations are practical, and we don't know how much harm global warming will do. It's a policy area where we have no idea what either the costs or the benefits will be." Adaptive response is thus a political median: it assumes that some degree of future warming will be inevitable but also that, over the long run, technology and policy can bring the problem under control and eventually reverse any harm. Schlesinger proposed this gradualist approach in an influential paper in the late '80s. Then-Senator Al Gore denounced the idea as "irresponsible" for not embracing immediate, sweeping rules. Today, adaptive response is the Clinton administration's global warming policy in the form of the proposed Kyoto Protocol, which is currently where the global warming rubber meets the road.

continued on page 53


MIRACLES DO HAPPEN BUT YOU HAVE TO WORK HARD AT THEM.
Dr. Chaim Weizmann
FIRST PRESIDENT,
WEIZMANN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE
AND FIRST PRESIDENT OF ISRAEL
Charlie's Place

THE WEIZMANN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE

The Early Years

As a seminal figure of the Zionist movement, Dr. Chaim Weizmann would undoubtedly feel a sense of satisfaction, if he were alive today. Both Israel and the Weizmann Institute of Science, which he founded, faithfully embody many of his visions and highest hopes.

Dr. Weizmann understood that Israel's success would result, in large part, from the development of basic science research and its application to solving the practical problems of living in an arid land of scarce resources. Moreover, he understood that a first class scientific establishment, while directly contributing to the new state's prosperity and growth, would also garner for Israel and for the Jewish people everywhere, the respect and admiration of the world.

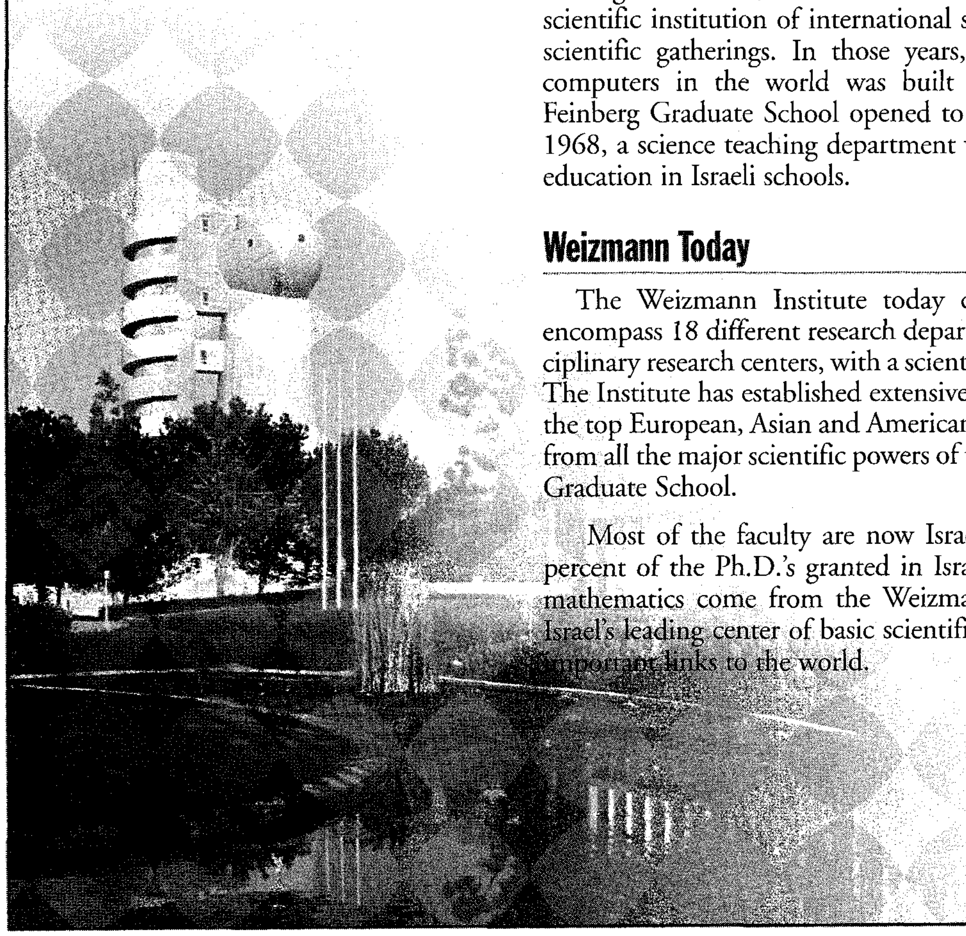
In 1934, along with their friend Dr. Weizmann, the Sieff family from England founded a modest research institute in Rehovot consisting of two small buildings and half a dozen scientists concentrating on organic chemistry (Dr. Weizmann's field), agriculture, bacteriology and pharmaceuticals.

In 1949, the Daniel Sieff Research Institute was officially renamed the Weizmann Institute of Science in honor of its president, Chaim Weizmann, who at that time was also the first president of Israel. During the 1950's, the Weizmann Institute established itself as a scientific institution of international standing, hosting international scientific gatherings. In those years, one of the first operational computers in the world was built at Weizmann. In 1958, the Feinberg Graduate School opened to train young scientists, and in 1968, a science teaching department was started to improve science education in Israeli schools.

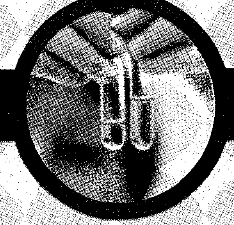
Weizmann Today

The Weizmann Institute today consists of 78 buildings that encompass 18 different research departments and almost 40 interdisciplinary research centers, with a scientific and technical staff of 2500. The Institute has established extensive collaborative agreements with the top European, Asian and American research centers, and students from all the major scientific powers of the world study at the Feinberg Graduate School.

Most of the faculty are now Israeli born and educated. Thirty percent of the Ph.D.'s granted in Israel in the natural sciences and mathematics come from the Weizmann Institute. The Institute is Israel's leading center of basic scientific research and one of its most important links to the world.



SCIENTISTS AT THE WEIZMANN INSTITUTE...



BIOMEDICAL

- Were the first to introduce synthetic copolymers to treat infectious and autoimmune diseases. Developed Copaxone® — an FDA-approved drug treatment for multiple sclerosis.
- Are developing an innovative therapy with activated immune cells from a patient's own body, to treat and possibly repair spinal cord injuries. Regeneration of the central nervous system has, until now, been assumed to be unachievable.
- Were the first to use cells from the amniotic fluid surrounding the human fetus, for diagnostic purposes. Amniocentesis is now commonly used for prenatal diagnosis of possible genetic defects.
- Are developing diagnostic kits and treatments for juvenile diabetes.

CANCER

- Have contributed to understanding the molecular basis of cancer and to the increasing capabilities in treating it.
- Were the first to accurately describe the multistep nature of carcinogenesis and metastasis.
- Discovered the mechanism of molecular regulation of blood-cell formation that became the basis for treatment of certain blood cancers.
- Participated in the team that discovered and cloned the most important tumor suppressor gene – p53, and are among the leaders in the world in elucidating how mutations in the p53 gene lead to the formation of cancerous tumors.
- Were pioneers in developing Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and Spectroscopy as tools to distinguish between benign and malignant breast tumors. This non-invasive technique may replace surgical biopsy for diagnosis of breast tumors, and may also be used to diagnose other cancerous tumors.

PHYSICS

- Made a critical contribution to the development of the conventional theory of the structure of matter. This theory describes the nature of the elementary particles that make up the atom and how they interact with each other.
- Designed the world's most advanced particle detectors, for use in high-energy collisions at accelerators at CERN in Switzerland and Brookhaven on Long Island.
- Contributed decisively to understanding the collective movement of protons and neutrons observed in certain regions of atomic nuclei. This breakthrough involved devising innovative experimental techniques that were later adopted by other research centers around the world.

NANOTECHNOLOGY

The age of smart and ultra-miniaturized materials – i.e., materials constructed from the atomic or molecular level — is opening one of the most exciting developments in scientific research today. Weizmann scientists are at the forefront of this new discipline.

- Developed layers of the world's purest gallium arsenide semiconductor material, allowing the production of electronic devices that are faster and more efficient than silicon ones.
- Synthesized both organic and inorganic molecules that can function as switches. Utilization of a molecular switch of this sort would be a big step towards producing ultra-miniature molecular memory units for computers.
- Designed a theoretical model for a biomolecular computer, which, when developed, could be inserted inside the human body as a therapeutic device. This ultra-small computer would react to the body's physiological conditions and make necessary corrections in protein biosynthesis to achieve optimal bodily functioning.

ENVIRONMENT

- Devised solar energy technology for use in disinfection of sewage water that is being tested at a pilot plant in Israel.
- Are developing a commercially feasible solar power plant, in collaboration with American and Israeli companies, at the Institute's solar tower – one of only three such facilities in the world.

Then and Now

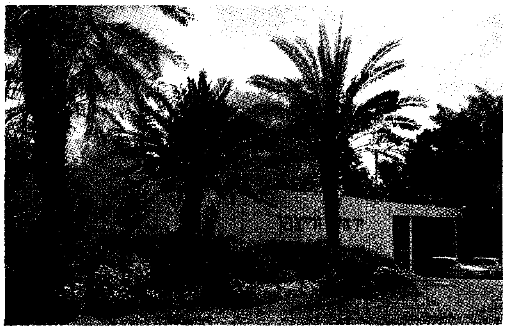
From its modest beginnings amidst the sand dunes and orange groves of Rehovot, the Weizmann Institute has flourished. Far from being an isolated, academic ivory tower, the Weizmann Institute has always been an integral part of Israel. Its scientists contributed to the nation-building effort from the time the new state was founded. Over the last 30 years, the Institute has been a driving force stimulating Israel's high tech economy, in designing and updating the science curriculum for Israeli schools, and in creating activities that encourage Israeli youth to develop a passion for science.

Past Achievements, Future Developments

The Weizmann Institute contributes greatly to Israel's position as one of the most advanced science - and technology-based societies in the world. As it celebrates its jubilee, the Weizmann Institute of Science continues to play an important role in shaping the future of technological and biomedical advances for Israel and the world. From genetic engineering at the molecular level, to extreme miniaturization in manufacturing, to biological computers and medical advances that will improve cancer treatment — Weizmann scientists will play key roles in the next century's scientific revolution.

SCIENCE FOR HUMANITY

For over 50 years, the American Committee for the Weizmann Institute of Science has marshaled support for the Weizmann Institute – one of the world's preeminent institutions devoted to advancing the frontiers of scientific knowledge. The Institute is engaged in over 1,000 projects to fight disease and hunger, create new technologies, protect the environment, and harness alternative sources of energy. Join with us in providing the resources for Weizmann scientists to continue their research at the cutting edge of scientific developments.



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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

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At Kyoto, Japan, in 1997, nations agreed in principle to a treaty whose essence defies easy phrasing: that, by the year 2012, the industrialized world would reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 5.2 percent below the level of 1990. As its share, the United States agreed in principle to cut greenhouse emissions to seven percent below the 1990 level. In 2012, the Kyoto Protocol says, the situation will be reassessed based on new knowledge. This is "adaptive response" thinking all the way, and Gore now firmly favors it.

THE KYOTO PROTOCOL allows industrial nations to obtain part of their cutbacks by reducing emissions in the developing world and then buying the credits: that is, through international carbon trading. Reductions will be much cheaper in developing nations. Chinese coal-fired power plants, for example, run at less than ten percent thermal efficiency, versus almost 40 percent for plants in the United States; retrofitting such plants with Western technology would cut global warming emissions for a lower price per avoided ton than anything an American generating station might do. International trading is also important because, although the industrialized world has so far put the bulk of artificial warming gases into the air, the developing world recently became the leading source of greenhouse emissions. China already burns more coal than the United States does, and, at current rates, within two decades it will surpass America to become the number one source of greenhouse gases.

Many Republicans have denounced Kyoto as giving away economic sovereignty. They rightly point out that the treaty contains a fatal-error clause: If the protocol ever goes into force, it could be amended by a three-quarters vote of the parties, with the amendments binding. This means the developing nations, which outnumber the West by roughly three-quarters, could vote to order the United States to stop using petroleum. Obviously any future attempt by Kyoto parties to dictate the economic policy of the United States would be ignored, but then why sign up for a treaty whose provisions you are planning to disregard? If this clause can't be negotiated out of the protocol, it's back to the drawing board.

Before the protocol was initialed in Japan, the Senate voted 95–0 to reject Kyoto unless it restricts greenhouse gas emissions from the developing world, which it does not; no greenhouse gas limits are imposed on developing nations. President Clinton has not submitted the treaty to the Senate for ratification and says he will not until it imposes "meaningful" restrictions on developing nations; currently, this places the protocol in limbo. If the 2000 presidential race pits Gore against Bush, the treaty may be a prominent issue, since Bush has said he believes global warming exists but that Kyoto would cost American jobs.

Initially cool to the Kyoto concept, developing nations are becoming enthusiastic as they realize potential commercial gains. Sunita Narain, an official of India's Centre for Science and Environment, recently wrote that the treaty "is increasingly being understood not as an environmental agreement but a trading agreement." A theory has arisen among conservatives that Kyoto is a backdoor attempt to start a new foreign-assistance initiative, channeling capital and technology to developing nations via free-market carbon trades. The protocol would indeed improve the fortunes of the developing world, and what's wrong with that? A decline of pollution from the developing world would have both humanitarian value and global benefits.

For its part, when Kyoto was happening, the European Union made numerous greener-than-thou pronouncements about how the United States was the world's font of pollution and enlightened Europe would act decisively to save the world; for this Europe was fondly praised in the U.S. press. Yet no EU member state has ratified Kyoto. The slaps at the United States haven't stopped, though. Last spring, the EU condemned international carbon trading. Europe's economic ministers have calculated that, if there is no trading, this will harm the energy-intensive U.S. economy more than it would European economies—and forget the ostensible goal of global greenhouse gas reduction.

BEYOND THE POLITICAL jockeying are what seem to be two intense objections to Kyoto. The first is that, even if all Western nations smile and ratify, as the West decreases greenhouse emissions, developing-world emissions will assiduously increase. Unrestricted under Kyoto, China, through the year 2012, is expected to add five tons of global warming gases to the air for every one the United States takes out. The second, seemingly killer, objection is that, even if the Kyoto rules realize complete success, total concentration of atmospheric greenhouse gases will diminish by only one percent relative to the anticipated 2012 figure. Ninety-nine percent of the problem will still hang in the air.

Despite these concerns, some version of Kyoto is still desirable, assuming the treaty's faults can be repaired through negotiation. If an international agreement serves only to diminish greenhouse buildup by one percent, that is preferable to allowing global warming gases to continue to accumulate without limitation.

Early technical breakthroughs are usually the hard ones. The nation may find that breakthroughs obtained in trying to meet early, modest greenhouse goals make possible technology that not only serves far-reaching goals but helps move society toward the clean-energy economy that must be achieved regardless of what the global thermostat does. We may also find that involving the West in cleanup of the developing world promotes the human enterprise by reducing global pollution and improving living conditions for several billion people. Basing this involvement on business-to-business trading rather than on government-to-government aid should help accelerate the adoption of market economies in the nations that need them most. Toss in the fact that whoever masters clean energy may have a significant competitive advantage in twenty-first-century economics, and moderate greenhouse reform not only seems justified—it looks like an exciting opportunity for a nation whose world leadership is based on being on the cutting edge of technology and market economics. ■

What liberalism still needs to learn about freedom.

The Liberal

By ORLANDO PATTERSON

AT THE END of the twentieth century, liberalism reigns supreme as the leading and, one might even say, overwhelming doctrine in the West and in most of the advanced countries of the world. Its central ideas seem to inform nearly all political and economic discourse. As political theorist Richard Bellamy observes, "Today all major groupings employ the liberal language of rights, freedom and equality to express and legitimize their views and demonstrate a corresponding general acceptance of liberal conceptions of democracy and the market." In economics, free-market doctrine has carried the day. And political philosophy is largely an argument between different versions of liberalism—from the egalitarian liberalism of Ronald Dworkin on the left through the preeminent moral neutralism and pluralist consensus of John Rawls in the center to the libertarianism of the early Robert Nozick.

No coherent conservative political philosophy has succeeded in gaining a recognized place in mainstream contemporary political discourse, not even that of Michael Oakeshott, for all its acerbic brilliance. On the left, communitarianism survives as an upstart, its most prominent advocates reduced to gaining notice by sniping at the liberal giants; and, as everyone knows, socialism and its Communist variant have one foot in the grave in Western Europe, lie buried in Eastern Europe, and rot alive in China.

The irony, of course, is that the liberal triumph in the realm of ideas occurs at a time when liberalism as a self-proclaimed political movement is moribund. Canada is the only Western country where a "Liberal" party rules. In the United States, the Democrats have managed to regain control of the White House only by shunning the "l-word." For all its currency, liberalism, one might say, has become the ideology that dares not speak its name.

What kind of doctrine can be so persuasive as an ideology yet wither so ignominiously as a movement? If I am to convey one point in this article, it is this: Liberalism—for all its universal pretensions, and for all the efforts of sympathetic historians to identify its history with the history of freedom itself—must be understood as an ensemble of doctrines and principles that center on but one conception of freedom.

To show why, let me first offer a historical definition of freedom. Freedom is one of the great continuities in Western culture, its central tendencies already well-established by the end of the fifth century B.C. From ancient times, it has been a triune cultural chord consisting of what we today call negative freedom, positive freedom, and the shared freedom of democracy. What holds them together is, paradoxically, the notion of power: we are free to the degree that we are not under the power of another person or force, to the degree that we have the opportunity and capacity to exercise power over ourselves and others, and to the degree that we share and participate in the public power or government of our

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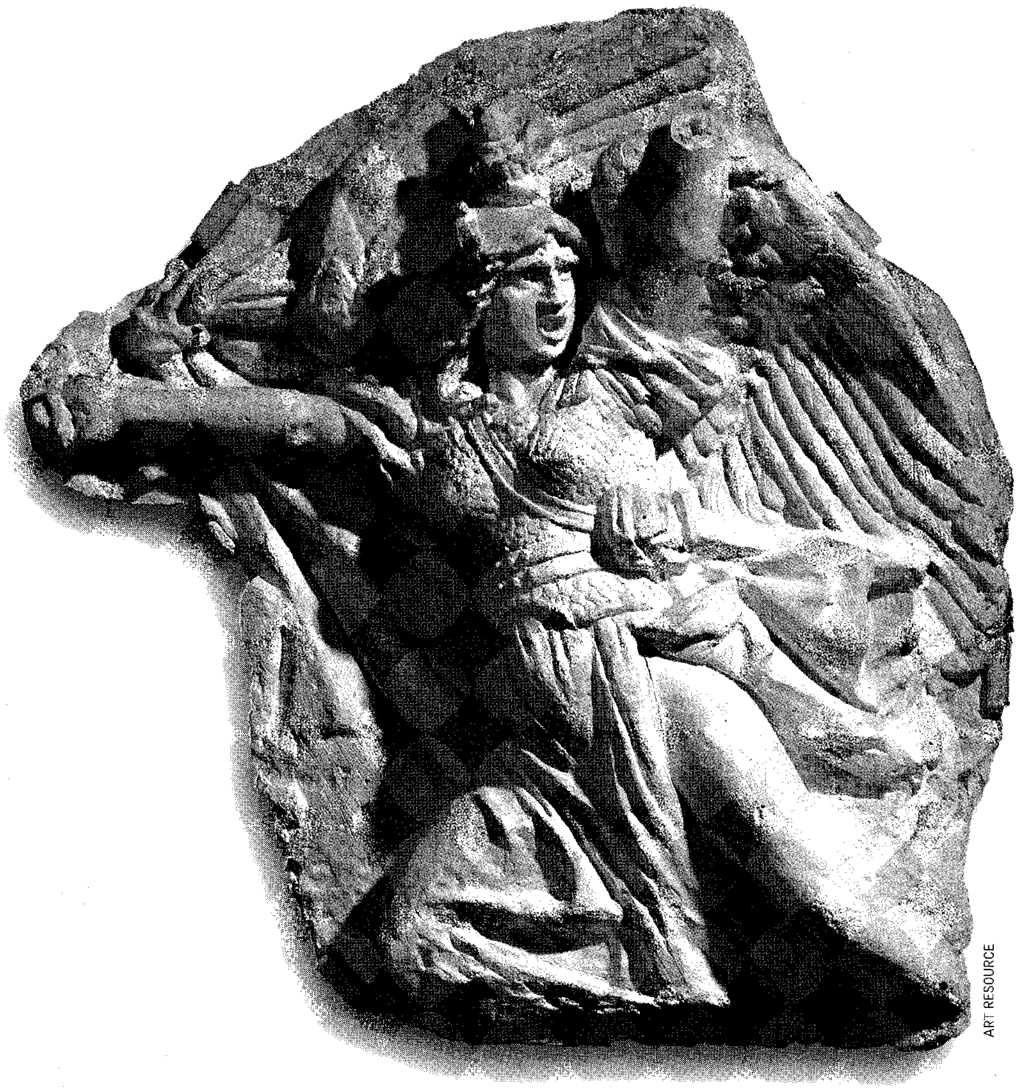
ORLANDO PATTERSON is John Cowles Professor of Sociology at Harvard University and the author of *Freedom: Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (Basic Books).

Millennium



ART RESOURCE

"The Genius of Freedom," model for "The Marseillaise," sculpture on the Arc de Triomphe; by François Rude

society. Freedom is the distinctive Western way of understanding and dealing with the problem of power.

Other civilizations have their own ways, and in the occasional ancient text of a non-Western civilization we will find some sage who has hit upon some aspect of this idea. But in no other civilization have these three ways of viewing power been conceived of as a triune, each note of which is contingent upon, yet in tension with, the others. Nowhere else has this triad of ways of relating to power been so powerfully valorized and actualized, and nowhere else have the finest minds of the civilization felt compelled to establish rationales for various interpretations of the triad. This is what one means by a tradition of freedom.

Up until the end of the eighteenth century, an important aspect of the Western tradition of freedom was that a religious tradition of discourse paralleled the secular one. Indeed, one of the major reasons why freedom survived as a major value throughout the Middle Ages and early modern period was the fact that Christianity had introjected the concept as its major metaphoric source—in the form of the religious doctrine of redemption—and made it central to its creed. Christianity, for those who have forgotten, is quintessentially a religion of freedom. Early modern secular thought—especially thoughts about freedom, as Ernst Kantorowicz demonstrated—was largely secularized Christology. In this way, the ancient understanding and discourse on freedom came to be either projected back into the secular world by the early modern thinkers or swapped into Protestant rhetoric that later ignited even more explosive secular reinterpretations, such as the Calvinist doctrine of the right to revolt. Even John Locke's philosophy is properly read as a secularized or applied theology—especially his discussion of freedom.

This should in no way suggest that freedom did not emerge in response to powerful social, economic, and political forces. Rather, like all cultural transmissions, it was a language, a code, in this case one for interpreting and struggling with power in all forms. Different classes and groups and different philosophical traditions have emphasized different notes of the chord, but it is rare to find any group or tradition of discourse before the nineteenth century that did not acknowledge all three. The triad is clearly visible in the writings of Machiavelli, Bodin, and Locke. It is just as transparent in the ideology of the "Common Man" posted by the German peasant rebels of 1525; it is given stark expression in the freedom tracts of the English proletarian visionary Gerrard Winstanley in the mid-seventeenth century; and it comes through with all the resonance of its internal tension in the Putney Debates of Cromwell and his soldiers.

Disputes over what freedom meant—and there were plenty in the ages leading up to the nineteenth century—focused on the relative importance of one note of the chord or another and on the groups to which freedom, however conceived, applied: Who was entitled to what rights and liberties? Who constituted the people and the electorate? No one questioned the religious aspect of liberty. Few saw any contradiction between negative liberty and positive liberty. And all who reflected on the condition of the free person insisted that some form of active, democratic citizenship was essential to that status. No one saw any contradiction between freedom expressed as democracy and freedom expressed as personal liberty. As late as the era of Thomas Jefferson and the other Founding Fathers, freedom meant participation in some kind of state.

Liberalism was a major break with this 2,300-year tradition. First and foremost, it was a fragmentation of the chordal tradition in its insistence on negative freedom as the only true freedom. In the early nineteenth century, partly in response to the revolutions in America and France, the idea took hold that freedom's greatest threat came from the state, as distinguished from kings, aristocrats, and the unjustly powerful. It was a short step from this to the demonization of the state. This entailed, further, the peculiarly liberal idea of chronic conflict between liberty (now narrowly conceived as negative, individual liberty) and democracy, identified with grasping claims of equality. Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* became the locus classicus of this view and, along with his other writings, was to have a powerful influence on emerging liberal thought in Europe as well as in America, most notably in the writings of John Stuart Mill. The upshot was the emergence of liberalism's pivotal doctrine: the idea that liberty was not just negative but a largely political value, one defined against the state. The measure of a man's freedom was the extent to which he could keep others, especially the state, away from him.

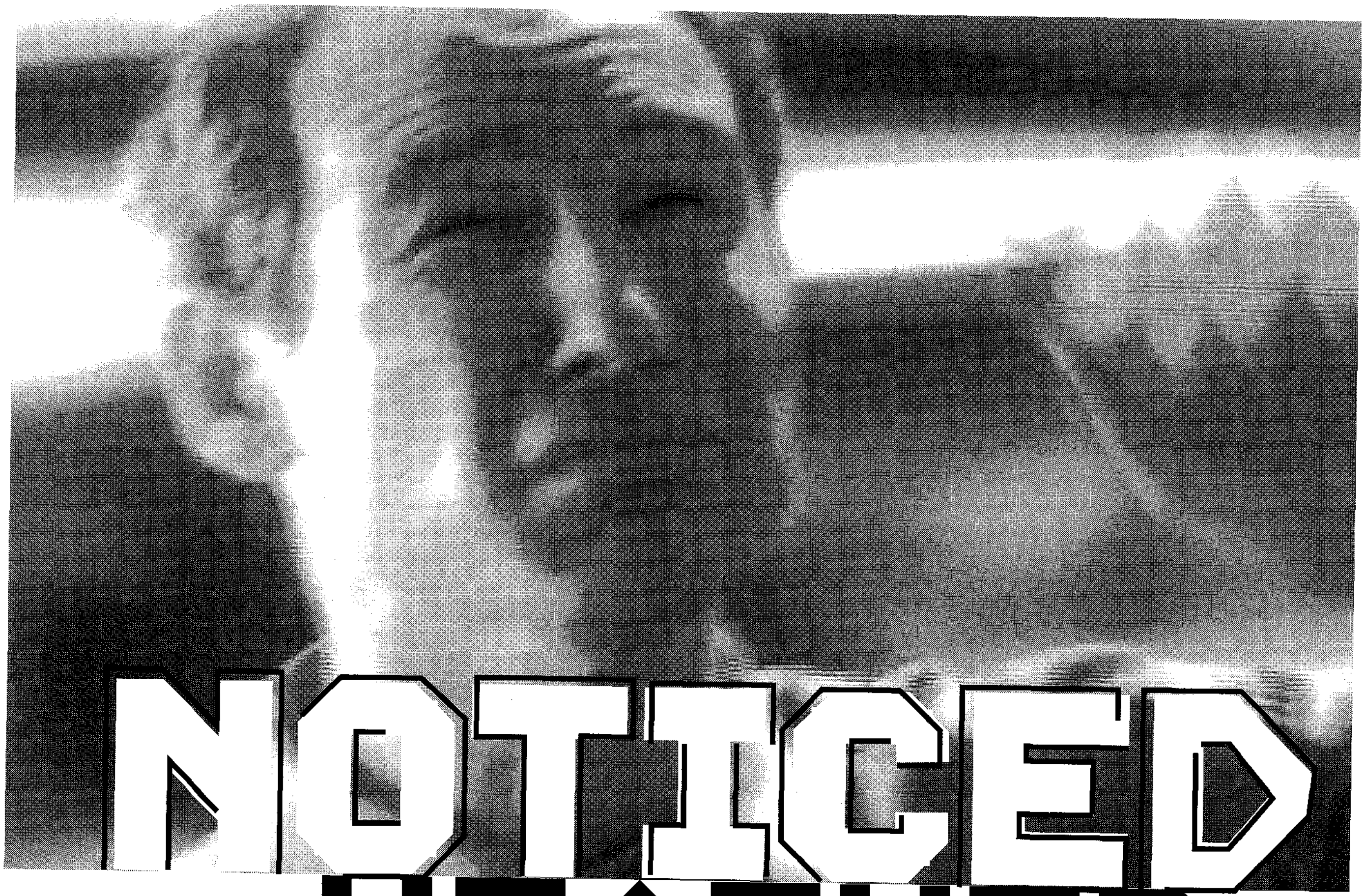
LIBERALISM NURTURED EGOISTIC individualism, the idea that a sane, adult person knows his interests best and should be left to pursue them as he pleases as long as he does no harm to others. Other forms of individualism, sometimes rampant individualism, had preceded liberalism; for example, the lordly individualism of the Middle Ages, the honorific individualism of the eighteenth-century European gentry, or the plantocratic individualism of the Old South. But egoistic, self-interested, materialistic individualism is what liberalism championed, and this has been both its blessing and its curse.

Its two great blessings were the sharp demarcation of the boundary between the private and the public and the denunciation of paternalism. The private sphere was that in which society has only what Mill calls an "indirect interest; comprehending all that portion of a person's life and conduct which affects only himself, or if it also affects others, only with their free, voluntary, and undeceived consent and participation." This then became "the appropriate region of human liberty," which Mill articulates as liberty of conscience, embracing free expression; the liberty "to plan our own life to suit our character"; and the liberty to associate. The combined emphasis on egoistic individualism and the private sphere led naturally to the anti-paternalistic doctrine of classical liberalism: "A person should be free to do as he likes in his own concerns," wrote Mill, "but he ought not to be free to do as he likes in acting for another, under the pretext that the affairs of another are his own affairs."

Liberalism was equally hostile to positive notions of liberty. In the nineteenth century this made it a progressive force in the battle against aristocratic notions of organic freedom as expressed, say, in Burkean doctrines, in the various Anglican notions of freedom, or in the American Puritan notion of ordered liberty, not to mention in the U.S. Southern plantocratic conception of liberty as embracing the power, the privilege—the liberty, no less—to enslave others. Most famously, it placed liberalism on the side of abolitionism, a movement that was itself a powerful symbolic affirmation of the moral rightness of negative liberty, in both England and America.

THE REVOLT AGAINST conservative forces was of a piece with liberalism's distancing of itself from religion. This was partly for the obvious reason that the old order everywhere was so firmly undergirded by established churches. It was also partly because of the memory of religious fanaticism and intolerance. Historians and interpreters of liberalism like to claim that the principle of toleration and the related separation of church and state were liberal inventions. Actually, pre-nineteenth-century Europe and colonial America arrived at the principle of toleration by pillaging, burning, and slaughtering in the name of various creeds until the realization dawned that only tolerance could stop the carnage. Long after the dust had settled and the last infidel had been burned, nineteenth-century liberals, the most brilliant of whom was Mill, provided the theoretical foundation for toleration. But equally important in liberalism's withdrawal from religion was the Enlightenment tradition of rationalism and reason. As Kant famously observed, with secular education, humankind emerged from its minority.

Two important consequences flowed from liberalism's reaction to Christianity. One was the quiet but eventually powerful undermining of all religious claims to the domain of freedom. It was during the nineteenth century that the physical separation of church and state was extended to an even deeper separation of secular from religious thought. From now on, the whole idea of inner freedom was simply



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IT'S TIME TO START FIXING GLOBAL WARMING

Paid for by the National Environmental Trust dismissed as religious stuff, something to be left to those concerned with their souls, but not a proper subject for rational men and women concerned with real freedom.

Liberalism may have succeeded in removing the realm of inner freedom from secular intellectual discourse on the subject, but it certainly did not make even a dent in the age-old Western conviction among ordinary people, including educated ones who went to church and did not read political philosophy, that the most meaningful freedom was the freedom of one's inner self. Americans, as citizens of the most religious of all the advanced nations, find it as easy to shift between their religious and secular understandings and accounts of freedom as Locke did, and a major problem with the present discourse of liberalism, dating back to its nineteenth-century commitment to rationalist secularism, is its irrelevance to this popular—and most ancient—conception of its central ideal.

But the liberal secular reaction against religion was to have another consequence that lives with it to this day; indeed, this consequence has recently become the doctrine's most salient feature. This is its moral neutralism, the idea that liberty is exclusively about the rules of right conduct and is scrupulously neutral about what is good. The most powerful classical exponent of moral neutralism was, of course, Mill. While insisting that he was "the last person to undervalue the self-regarding virtues," Mill felt strongly that the individual should be left to "do with his life for his own benefit what he chooses to do with it," since he "is the person most interested in his own well-being." Further: "In the conduct of human beings towards one another, it is necessary that general rules should for the most part be observed, in order that people may know what they have to expect; but in each person's own concerns, his individual spontaneity is entitled to free exercise." This has been one of the most influential statements in modern liberalism and is reflected most powerfully today in the work of John Rawls.

Yet, in many traditions of freedom, this statement is an abomination, a recipe for sin, selfishness, loneliness, and irresponsibility. It goes against the grain of all Christian thought on freedom. As both John Milton and the great Calvinist thinkers repeatedly made clear, men and women are given the gift of freedom in trust to do good as God defines it. Liberal moral neutralism also runs in strong opposition to the notions of freedom of many conservatives, from Edmund Burke to William Bennett—all of whom tend to conceive of it as the liberty to find one's place in a good and virtuous sociopolitical order. And it is the key bone of contention for communitarians.

It is also philosophically suspect. Increasingly, modern liberalism's disdain for what Rawls calls "perfectionism," the foundations of its claims to impartiality, and its pretensions to be some kind of higher-order meta-theory that can be embraced by persons with very different conceptions of the good are being challenged. It is too often the case, especially for conservatives, that liberal impartiality seems to favor the kinds of values liberals endorse. As Thomas Nagel observes, this presents serious problems for any liberal theory of distributive justice, "for we have to use some conception of what is good for people in deciding what to distribute and what to promote, and the choice of that conception raises similar questions of impartiality."

The idea that people can continue truly to believe in their beliefs without believing them to be true may make sense to academics and philosophers, but for most people—contrary to Nagel's optimistic wish—it amounts to skepticism, if not cynicism. Besides, a moment's reflection reveals that liberalism does indeed have a quite defensible conception of the good life, which William Galston summarizes well as "the theory of rationalist humanism"—and to pretend that it does not simply creates confusion.

Institutionally, liberalism was closely tied to blossoming industrial capitalism and to the liberal political party that emerged in England as part of a fragile coalition. Thus did liberalism attain both doctrinal and institutional coherence by the middle of the nineteenth century. Some have argued that liberalism's relationship with capitalism goes beyond the purely historical and contingent. Anthony Arblaster, for example, thinks that there are certain "half-hidden commitments" to the doctrine, such as private property, inequality, and capitalism. Milton Friedman does not believe these commitments are half-hidden; to the contrary, he has argued that "competitive capitalism" is "a system of economic freedom and a necessary condition for political freedom."

By the late nineteenth century, this coherence began to fall apart, due to changes in the laissez-faire institutional basis of the economies of Europe, to the demands of the growing working class for greater security and political participation, and to attacks from other traditions of freedom on both the left and the right. Actually, established liberal leaders in England made serious attempts to meet these challenges. What led to the downfall of liberalism as a political movement was World War I, which not only strained the resources of Britain and discredited the established classes but promoted a considerable level of government activity and forced reforms of the conditions of both women and workers.

British developments were generally mirrored in most of Western Europe. Resurgent conservative parties on the right, together with social democratic movements (which were often based on labor unions), became the dominant electoral forces, leading to the gradual triumph of the welfare state in one form or another. Beyond World War I, the major international events of the first half of the century—the Great Depression and World War II—merely reinforced the social democratic tide. I tend to see the rise of social democracy as a modernized and universalized reintegration of the millennia-old Western chord of freedom. What nineteenth-century capitalism and classical liberalism had shattered and redefined as a single negative note, the social democratic movements reassembled in the liberal democracies of twentieth-century Europe: freedom as the negation of inherited personal power, freedom as empowerment and security, and freedom, once again, as participation in the state. Only now, of course, the chord was played by all adults, not just the wealthy and aristocratic few.

This is not to say that the social democratic reintegration of freedom was perfect. Indeed, today the welfare state faces its own crisis, partly due to its expense, but, more importantly, due to the fact that it has taken the collectivist approach to welfare too far, resulting in the generation of dependency among the poorest groups that it aims to protect. In chordal terms, the social democratic theory of freedom has played the note of positive freedom too hard, undermining personal freedom and responsibility in the process. This, in turn, has generated not only high external costs that threaten the collective good but also individuals who lack the will to participate—economically or politically.

There were two major exceptions to liberalism's pattern of development among the advanced Western societies: Germany and the United States. While it is true that, in the long run, Germany took the Western European path of social democracy, its course, as the world knows, was devastatingly checkered. Germany's peculiar history as a Central European cluster of states only half within the Western community, its late unification, and its even later industrialization, together with its religious and cultural traditions, culminated during the nineteenth century in what Leonard Krieger calls "the peculiar nineteenth-century version of political freedom," a version in which freedom was closely linked to princely and state power rather than being its enemy. Actually, in the long course of Western history, there was really nothing new about this. It had been the Roman Emperor Augustus's view of freedom, etched in stone in his autobiography, the *Res gestae divi Augusti*, and it was the dominant secular view during the Middle Ages.

Germany never quite gave up this ancient, lordly view of freedom. Instead, it did for the note of freedom-as-power what Western liberalism had done for the note of negative freedom: it isolated it from the other two notes in the chord and made it the only true freedom. Germany's state-led modernization merely reinforced this pattern. The isolation and co-optation of the capitalist classes in Germany meant that liberty as an ideal had no contingent link with capitalism, as had happened in Western Europe.

Instead, liberty became the darling of the Enlightenment intellectuals, themselves largely in the service of the state elite, and in their hands it became a cultural and spiritual thing in the service of the nation and the *Volk*. Kant, who is celebrated among modern American liberals as their intellectual fountainhead, played some devious tricks with liberty at home, as did Hegel and the other great German Enlightenment figures. Kant had no problem reconciling liberty with monarchal absolutism, and, even more amazingly, he completely reversed the role and significance of the public-private distinction that was later to become such a central feature of Anglo-American liberalism. As Krieger notes: "Instead of assigning private opinions to individual freedom and their public expression to restriction by social authority, Kant insisted that 'the public use of one's reason must always be free,' while 'the private use of reason, on the other hand, may often be very narrowly restricted without particularly hindering the progress of enlightenment.'" When a people's greatest theorist of freedom took practical positions like that,

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the future course of their liberty was in deep trouble.

Germany's humiliation in World War I proved even more of a disaster for liberalism than it was in the rest of Europe, and, by the waning years of the Weimar Republic, liberalism was completely discredited. But, while in the rest of Western Europe the strongest attack on liberalism came from the emerging social democratic left, in Germany the main assaults came from the Marxist left of Rosa Luxemburg and the nationalistic, ethnocentric right of Ernst Jünger, Oswald Spengler, Carl Schmitt, and Moeller van den Bruck—who wrote that "liberalism causes nations to perish." The stage was set for deep political polarization and, ultimately, the Nazi triumph, which epitomized the worst potential in the Western tradition of freedom: namely, the isolation of the idea of freedom as power collectively expressed in the organic sovereignty of the all-conquering state.

Even after World War II, liberalism remained suspect in Germany. The left moved toward social democracy and socialism, the right toward the "social market." It was not until the 1980s, when the American right was beating down modern welfare-state liberalism with the club of nineteenth-century liberalism, and when communitarians, feminists, and postmodernists were attacking liberalism's foundationalist and universalist claims from their end of the spectrum, that German intellectuals and politicians finally rediscovered liberalism. German critical theorists were finding in liberal universalism the foundation principle of human freedom and democracy; Otto Graf Lambsdorff issued the "Lambsdorff paper," which marked the small but influential Free Democratic Party's return to a market-oriented program (and, not incidentally, the party's readoption of the designation "liberal").

IN AMERICA, THE pathways to freedom have been just as exceptional and paradoxical as those of Germany and, for African Americans, nearly as tragic. Louis Hartz's smooth linear curve from the Mayflower to the cold war champion of freedom cannot be taken seriously. Colonial American history can indeed be read as the evolution of freedom, but nowhere did that freedom take a liberal path. The Puritan Northerners brought with them a thoroughly Christian view of freedom—which they correctly defined as "ordered liberty"—that was as much concerned with inner freedom as with outer affairs: "Internally as to his Mind, Externally as to his Person," as John Wise, one of the Puritans' most penetrating theoreticians, put it. There was moral purpose in life, and freedom was the means toward the realization of God's will. The covenant with God sternly entailed a covenant with the members of one's community. Whether modern communitarians know it or not, this is the origin of their doctrine of freedom. It was fully triadic on both the inner and outer levels: negatively, the escape from sin and English tyranny; positively, the fulfillment of God's purpose through prayer, work, and discipline. It was also participatory and egalitarian: the equality before God and the covenant with one's fellows.

But it could be harsh to the unbeliever and the slacker. And it had all sorts of unexpected consequences, the most important being outward material success and inward self-affirmation. Obsessive piety and inward introspection, as Sacvan Bercovitch has brilliantly showed, led paradoxically to "a sort of narcissistic *Liebestod*, constantly reenacted because incapable of fulfillment," which inevitably had to "break loose into the world at large." The explosive consequence of this "internal Armageddon" was the invention of what Bercovitch calls "the American self."

Well, maybe only the Northern part of it. Down in the Southern colonies, there were equally paradoxical developments. From the colonial era to the bloody termination of the Civil War, the South had its mind and heart set on the achievement of one very ancient version of the chord of freedom: an organic, neo-feudal order in which the dominant note of the chord was an honorific individualism wherein a man's positive liberty inhered in his power over others and his ownership of a great domain. To secure this, negative freedom was essential; the bickering with the imperial center, locally reflected in the interminable quarrels between governors and assemblymen, started early.

AND THERE WAS democracy, the third note of the neo-feudal chord. This is the first great paradox of the South, as Edmund Morgan and a long line of distinguished historians of the South have shown. Large-scale slavery in which the slave class belonged to a different "race" from the mass of the poor Euro-Americans not only made it easy to divide and rule but minimized the cost of mass democracy for the ruling planter class. In much the same way as it had emerged in ancient Athens, the ethno-racial solidarity of master class and freeman, conceived of as a master race of the free against the unfree, unwhite, and inferior slaves, led naturally into the inclusively exclusive demos that is the primitive core of democracy. Thus in the slave South there was both the history and the prehistory of freedom: its cultural inheritance and its pristine reconstruction. By the eighteenth century the majority of free men had the right to vote, the first such development in the Western world since the fall of ancient Athens. Two groups of people paid dearly for this miracle of freedom: the Native Americans and, of course, the African American slaves, whose holocaust was not of the body but of culture, heart, and soul.

But there was an even greater irony in the history of the South, and it goes back to the dominant note of the plantocratic chord of freedom: its ancient idea of freedom as powers and privileges. When the Revolutionary War came, the leaders of both North and South loudly proclaimed that they fought to defend their liberty. The chord was the same, but the fundamental note was different. For the Northerners, the negative note was clearly fundamental. It was the assault on property, the injustice of unfair taxes, that most offended them. Not that the taxes were all that high—it was the principle that outraged them. Property was the outward expression of inner worth, of God's approval. This is what pietistic *Liebestod* had led to. They read Locke and found all the justification they needed, if in fact they needed any. In the process, they also revived Locke's intellectual fortunes.

For Southerners, who took the lead in the Revolutionary War, the dominant note had to do with their powers and privileges. And, like the Northerners' *Liebestod*, it too had been refined and renamed. Their primitive honorific conception of freedom-as-power had become "rights." This is the origin of the American—and, in most real senses, the world's—idea of rights. Of course, the idea of rights had been around for some time in European legal, political, and religious thought, and the Southerners took from Locke, Pufendorf, and other sources what they needed. It is a misreading of history, however, to imagine that people went to war to defend ideas they had read in old books of political philosophy. The important thing about the American Revolution and its immediate sequel was that, for the first time in history, men came to take rights seriously, so seriously that they not only waged a war of independence in their name but inscribed them in a constitution. This was only possible because these ideas were deeply held personal beliefs that they had acquired not from books but from their culture.

And these personal beliefs consisted primarily of the slaveholders' notion of freedom as personal power. When these ideas were syncretized with the Northern Christian doctrine of equality before God, the explosive consequence was the idea of rights as the possession no longer of the privileged few but of all people.

The idea that rights as a constitutional principle, not as the plaything of intellectuals, originated in the positive freedom of the slaveholder class may be hard for some to swallow, especially African Americans who are today the major beneficiaries and advocates of what has been called the "rights revolution" of our times. But swallow it we must. We can always, of course, just say, with the historians of ideas, that it all goes back to Locke. But, alas, Locke not only invested in the slave trade; he wrote the constitution of South Carolina, arguably the most brutal of the Southern slave states.

It is worth noting that British liberalism, and indeed the broader history of freedom in Britain, pays scant attention to rights rhetoric. Jeremy Bentham famously dismissed it as "nonsense on stilts." And not only is it absent from Mill, but one of Mill's few references to contract theory was dismissive. The reality of rights as a legal and constitutional claim distinct from its rhetoric is an almost peculiarly American invention, the nation's single greatest contribution to the real history of freedom.

IN THE NINETEENTH century, liberalism was to triumph in America in a manner very similar to its path in Britain, with considerable influences from that source. As in Britain, it was strongly allied to the abolitionist movement and, in the end, emerged triumphant in the Civil War, which can be read as a struggle between two irreconcilable ideas: a liberal notion of negative freedom and individualism, horrified by the idea of human slavery, and, on the other side, the last holdout of the ancient chord of freedom—focused once again, in a reversion from its revolutionary exaltation in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, on the more primitive idea of freedom as power over others in an organic, plantocratic world.

The big difference between America and Europe, of course, was the failure of socialist movements seriously to challenge America at the turn of the century. There have been many explanations for this American exceptionalism. I do not have the space to enter this debate here, except to say that the presence of a large semi-caste of African Americans who continued to live under a culture of slavery even after the legal ending of slavery, the great influx of immigrant labor, and the playing off of both groups against each other are major parts of the story. Recent studies have suggested that the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were not as hopeless an environment for some incipient forms of social security in America as was originally thought. The fact remains, though, that the first true challenge to classical liberalism in America came only with the crisis of capitalism during the Depression, followed by World War II.

Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal was the closest that America would come to a reintegration of the chord of freedom along the lines then being prepared in Western Europe. It may seem odd that, in articulating his doctrine of freedom in the famous "Four Freedoms" speech of 1941, FDR used classical liberal language: not freedom to a secure life in which basic human needs are met, but freedom from want; not freedom to participate in a democratic state, but freedom from fear. Nonetheless, in this shrewd, negative rephrasing of positive freedoms, Roosevelt preemptively undermined his liberal critics and, at the same time, foresaw the basic flaw in what would soon become the most celebrated postwar restatement of classical liberalism: Isaiah Berlin's view that there are two concepts of liberty, one positive and inevitably evil, the other negative and uniquely worth pursuing. It also anticipated what Amartya Sen has recently made clear: "Individual freedom is quintessentially a social product, and there is a two-way relation between (1) social arrangements to expand individual freedoms and (2) the use of individual freedoms not only to improve the respective lives but also to make the social arrangements more appropriate and effective."

TODAY WE HAVE to speak of at least three kinds of liberalism. First there is libertarianism, with its extreme curtailment of state power and egoistic individualism, perhaps best represented in the works of the early Nozick. There is, secondly, economic liberalism, which tends to equate freedom with completely free markets and a minimalist state, Friedrich von Hayek being the best representative. What is sometimes called neo-classical liberalism is really a more moderate version of economic liberalism rather than a genuine revival of classical nineteenth-century liberalism, one that has to take account of late-twentieth-century political and governmental realities. Thirdly, there is the political liberalism of Rawls, whose works have had wide appeal among moderate and left-of-center political theorists and practitioners.

The most fascinating development in the history of freedom during the second half of the century has been its diffusion outside of Europe and North America, although the record has been one of fits and starts. After the initial promise of the postwar and decolonization years, culminating in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the independence of the Third World, there was profound disappointment. Communism made a mockery of positive freedom and demonstrated once and for all the need for a chordal integration of the three notes of freedom. With a few notable exceptions, one ex-colony after another, and nearly all of Latin America, moved toward dictatorship.

The cold war period demonstrated, alas, that the liberal democracies of the West could and would sacrifice some measure of democracy and freedom in the interests of national security—both at home and abroad. To some extent, this was perhaps the best that could be expected in a dismal trade-off. The alternative—abroad, at least—was, in all likelihood, a crude form of Soviet client state that may well have been worse than the dictatorships supported by the West. Nonetheless, it was crudely cynical to maintain, as many in the West did, that such dictatorships as Chile, Argentina, and even South Africa were actually free because they had free markets and respected contracts.

INDEED, THE COLD war period also saw the enormous success of the East Asian "little tigers" under authoritarian regimes; this and the economic failures of faithful democracies in places such as India or the Anglophone Caribbean demonstrated conclusively that there was no inherent link between freedom and capitalism; the Western connection had been largely contingent and historical. Milton Friedman got it only partly right. Capitalism can promote liberty, and it usually does, but only when the capitalist class is in control. Capitalism, however, can thrive under a variety of political systems, including some very nasty ones. And liberty can thrive under some pretty desperate economic conditions, as poverty-stricken India and Jamaica amply demonstrate.

In spite of the contradictory and sometimes egregious role of the Western democracies in the politics of the non-West, the West's own postwar history has been one of the continued expansion of freedom and the extension of it to the entire population. In America, the reintegration never quite happened, even though the extent and depth of the country's welfare state should not be underestimated. America's great success story regarding the history of freedom has been the civil rights movement and the final embrace of the country's African American population as full citizens with equal rights. The further extension of these rights—modeled on the civil rights movement—to women, gays, and other minorities rounds out this glorious process.

The rights revolution, however, may have run its course. There was always something intellectually awkward about its use for the promotion of group interests. The notion of rights is inescapably individualistic, and the attempt by African Americans and other minorities, as well as women, to adapt it to ends such as affirmative action were bound to founder. In broader terms, the growing commitment of these groups to identity politics and the celebration of difference has led inevitably to conflicts with all versions of liberalism. Today, liberalism is once again under siege from both right and left.

As Elizabeth Frage recently pointed out, liberalism's universalism and its commitment to individualism and the equality of people tend to decategorize groups such as women. Its admirable propensity to treat people equally often means treating men and women the same. Its sharp demarcation between the public and the private and its discomfort with passion lead to a distrust of movements emphasizing trust, solidarity, care, and group loyalty. What is true of the women's movement is even truer of African Americans and of the entire multicultural project.

Since 1989, freedom—not liberalism, but freedom—has spread and triumphed all over the world. The record, of necessity, has been spotty, but there is no doubting the overall trend. It may be only a matter of time before the whole world can be called free. For 1988–1989, Freedom House rated 88 of the world's 191 countries (46 percent) as free, meaning that "they maintain a high degree of political and economic freedom and respect civil liberties"; 53 countries (28 percent) were rated as partly free, "enjoying more limited political rights and civil liberties, often in a context of corruption, weak rule of law, ethnic strife, or civil war"; and 50 countries (26 percent) were rated as unfree. Only a decade previously, however, 68 percent of the world's nations had been judged unfree.

But to call the present diffusion and embrace of freedom the triumph of liberal democracy would be once again to confuse the history of liberalism with the history of freedom. In some cases we do find that liberal democratic institutions have been adopted, the most perfect case being perhaps the little island state of Barbados in the Caribbean, its political rituals faithfully mimicking even the bewigged members of the British Parliament. Costa Rica and post-Pinochet Chile come to mind. However, what we mostly find is that the enormously generative power of the broader Western tradition of freedom is being adapted to local cultural and institutional exigencies.

WE SHOULD NOT be alarmed by this, since it is no different from the processes that we saw unfolding throughout the West before the co-optation of freedom by liberalism. Thus, we should expect that, in some countries, democracy will be made the fundamental note, with negative and positive freedoms important, if secondary—India and several of the Caribbean islands have followed this route. In others, negative freedom will be the fundamental note of freedom, with positive freedom and democracy following in its wake—the path of the East Asian countries, especially Korea and Taiwan. In others, positive freedom will be made fundamental, with negative freedom secondary and democracy a weak and distant goal (as is the case, perhaps, in China). And, in other parts of the world, most notably Eastern Europe, there will be a premature commitment to one note—in this case, negative freedom—with profound disappointment and confusion as the old order collapses without compensating material benefits.

As the non-Western world grapples with this most complex of Western cultural exports, however, it is only natural that it will turn to the West for guidance in the art of living with it and consolidating it. As the Western nation most distinctively forged in the fire of freedom and as the world's sole superpower, America, now enjoying one of capitalism's longest and most spectacular booms, is inevitably the nation expected to provide such leadership.

This is a great opportunity for a great world power.

Unencumbered by the threat of nuclear violence and the perversities of the cold war, America has the chance to realize what for so long it has imagined to be its destiny: the beacon of its great ideal of freedom and the primary agent of its global diffusion. This could be America's finest moment. Alas, it is blowing it to the winds.

For what the world finds when it turns to America for intellectual leadership on the art of freedom is a predominant doctrine of liberalism that conceives of freedom too narrowly, a doctrine divorced from any real political base, eschewing any explicit definition of ends even as it covertly promotes a particular set of them, and generally under siege from lesser doctrines on the left and the right. These lesser doctrines are hardly likely to impress the rest of the world. The non-Western world does not need communitarianism; as often as not, it is trying to get away from corrupt local variants of it. What it needs from America is a more coherent theory of the application of rights, especially when its implicit individualism comes into conflict with the more fundamental needs of development. Yet, the idea, powerfully argued by Amartya Sen, that freedom is both constitutive of and instrumental for development—that political freedoms, social and economic opportunities and entitlements, a protective safety net and guarantees of trust, openness, and disclosure in social relations are "distinct types of rights" that complement one another and "advance the general capability of a person"—is at odds not only with the authoritarian developmentalism of states such as China, but, ironically, with the "utility-centered" doctrines of freedom currently prevalent in the United States.

Finding little guidance in its doctrines, the world can still turn to the practice of freedom in America and to the example of the nation's great leaders and statesmen. When it does so, it will find that, while the notes of negative and positive freedom ring gloriously in America, the third note of its cultural chord—democracy—has acquired a tinny, hollow timbre. Wealthy interests corrupt the campaign system and the legislative process, and leaders seem unable to do anything about it. The political party system and electoral process focus on candidates rather than issues; character assassination and scandal have crowded out serious debate. Most astonishing of all, a swarm of parochial little men has captured Congress and has turned its back on the world in a new isolationism that holds the United Nations in contempt and plays partisan games with treaties the rest of the world has worked hard to fashion.

Where there should be the bold affirmation of noble ends befitting a great world polity, there is only a cautious, noncommittal doctrine of moral neutrality. Where there should now be a vibrant democracy that has abolished want and inspires its electorate to the highest levels of participation, there is apathy and corruption. Where there should be global leadership and vision, there is now a void.

It need not remain this way. America now leads the world in scientific innovation, artistic creativity, and the sheer marvel of its economy. If we channel this civilizational force toward the theory and practice of politics, the next century will not only be unambiguously American, but also the one that witnesses the complete global triumph of freedom. ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Primal Stuff

PUNCHES AND BLOOD and scars, then more punches and blood and scars, these are the ground of **Fight Club** (20th Century Fox). A good deal of the time we want to avert our eyes, but at no time can the film be dismissed as mere exploitative violence. We come to feel that our very endurance of the film, whether or not we can abide all of it, is part of what the film is about.

The screenplay by Jim Uhls derives from a novel by Chuck Palahniuk, and was directed by David Fincher. Fincher's last film was *The Game*, in which a conventional business type, Michael Douglas, was suddenly plunged into near-primitive circumstances right in the middle of a modern city. *Fight Club* takes the idea further: conventional types in a modern city meet secretly one evening a week to fight—not to box but to fight with intent to injure, each man against a new opponent every week, with one badly bloodied man helping up the worse bloodied other man when the fight is finished.

The point is plain. These men, varied in type and occupation, feel that their lives are laminated. Nothing in their computerized existence feeds a hunger for adventure, for aggression, for the infliction or suffering of pain—for everything that masculinity has come to mean in social tropes and in legend. Blood is their warrant of triumph, not over one another, but over torpor. The problem of how they heal quickly enough to fight again the following week, is simply not addressed. (The film doesn't mention it, but perhaps they are also frustrated because war, which used to be an outlet for these drives, may no longer call for much actual fighting. Neither does the film explicitly note the hint of latent homosexuality that embroiders all this masculine bonding.)

Brad Pitt plays the charismatic, clever founder of the club and of other clubs that spring up in this city and elsewhere. We meet him through Edward Norton, here a disconsolate office worker who has been frequenting support groups of various kinds, just because he is lonely. Pitt inveigles him into fighting. Norton tries it, is hurt and enlivened by it, and goes to the club. The club is very secret, which of course heightens its male-bonding appeal, and Norton is soon a devotee.

Two factors keep *Fight Club* from being only a grovel in gore or a sophomoric morality play about male frustration. First, Pitt's character. He is that protean persona familiar from American fiction (prime instance: Melville's *Confidence-Man*) who takes many forms—in this film a movie projectionist, a waiter at a banquet (who pees in the soup), a soap manufacturer. He is a muscular Puck, capable of many shapes in which to lure men to his cause. Second, the film's method—methods, really. It moves back and forth quickly from the intensely realistic to the fantastic. In an otherwise straightforward scene Norton, who provides a voice-over all along, addresses the camera; we see his adventures in the cavern of ice that he feels within him; at one point he searches for the disappeared Pitt in various cities with only symbolic clues to follow; some business with a pistol toward the end exemplifies the symbiosis that has grown between him and Pitt as the fight club moves outward toward drastic civil aggression. In fact, Fincher lays on dollops of so many styles that the film becomes a small anthology of modes.

One antecedent seems clear: Fincher has apparently been influenced by David Cronenberg, particularly Cronenberg's *Crash*. In that film people found sexual excitement in auto crashes, even in some degree of injury. Not only is there an echo of that masochistic excitement in *Fight Club*, but Norton's daytime job is with an auto company, investigating crashes.

Fincher knows how to deploy the Pitt testosterone required for this role. Pitt also displays his growing flexibility as an actor, with a sense of phrase in word and movement. Norton, who at times looks like the young Dustin Hoffman, is adequate as the nerd who collapses inward so far that at last he finds his backbone. Helena Bonham Carter plays a druggie slut who winds into the lives of both men, principally because the film needs a woman and the two men need a chance to display their sexual prowess or lack of it. Carter enjoys a role far from her usual social loftiness, and she insinuates herself, semi-disgustingly, semi-pathetically, throughout. And a bow to Alex McDowell, whose ingenious production designs seem to place the film on a gray, cheerless planet.

But a chief fascination for me, horrid yet gripping, was less in the film itself than in the fact that the film-makers and their stars thought the idea was timely and that they are being proved right. Yeats's rough beast keeps slouching along.

To another sphere, another hunger. Lately I read an article on the recent spate of films about the supernatural—notably *The Sixth Sense*, *Stigmata*, *The Blair Witch Project*, and *Stir of Echoes*. The article drew inferences from the arrival of these pictures more or less in a clump and the huge success of some of them. In our age (said the article), which makes the materialism of the past look picayune, people crave something larger in concept than the data of this world, something mysterious, ambiguous, nonmaterial.

Possibly so, but that craving is hardly a specific product of these times. It raged all through the last century, the first century of the motion picture, in periods of material boom or material depression, in war and peace and everything in between. Whatever the dominant mood of the day, supernatural films have always been wanted. The really extraordinary point is that the film, the most realistic medium ever devised, inseparable from realistic means, has, from its beginnings, been used to confirm the non-realistic—the supernatural, even the spiritual. From the very start, films were made of Bible stories and of ghosts and of out-of-body experiences and of senses other than the usual five. (The first Passion Play film was produced in 1898.) More relevant than the recent cluster of such pictures is the fact that they are only the latest in a line.

Immediately on its arrival, the film medium was enlisted in the cause of its modal opposite. André Bazin wrote:

> Not only does some marvel or some fantastic thing on the screen not undermine the reality of the image, on the contrary it is its most vivid justification. Illusion in the cinema is not based as it is in the theater on convention tacitly accepted by the general public, rather, contrariwise, it is based on the inalienable realism of what is shown.

There's some wry humor in that paradox. ■

Books.

[AT BARNES & NOBLE]

Looking East

OUT OF PLACE

by Edward W. Said

The acclaimed author of *Orientalism* recalls his rich, varied, and sometimes turbulent coming of age. Schooled in Jerusalem, Cairo, and the United States, Said reveals in a moving and witty memoir how the numerous cultural influences led to an unsettling confusion of identities, but also gave him the insight to become one of the most respected social thinkers of our time. (Knopf)

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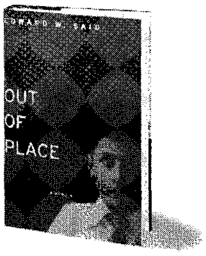

DOWNFALL

by Richard B. Frank

There are many theories regarding America's use of the atomic bomb in World War II—for instance, that it was used to save American lives or that it was instrumental in preventing the Soviets from expanding in the Pacific. *Downfall* looks beyond the theories to examine the reality of the bomb's decisive role in delivering a fatal blow to the Japanese empire and in ending the war. (Random House)

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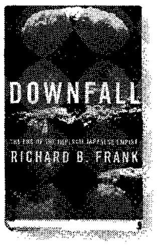

DAUGHTER OF CHINA

by Meihong Xu & Larry Engelmann

In a powerful chronicle of loyalty, betrayal and oppression, Meihong Xu moves from being a foot soldier in the People's Liberation Army to becoming a prisoner of it. Ordered by her government to spy on American professor Larry Engelmann, Xu diligently did as she was told. However, passion eventually overpowered patriotism in this true story of forbidden love. (Wiley)

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THE CHAN'S GREAT CONTINENT
China in Western Minds
JONATHAN D. SPENCE

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by Michael Lind

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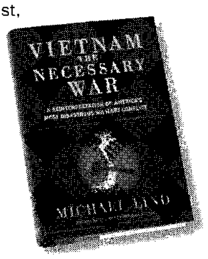

THE MULTIPLE IDENTITIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST

by Bernard Lewis

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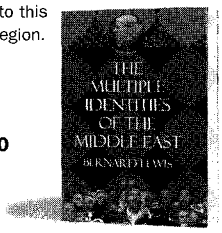

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Jed Perl on Art

Signs of the Times

DIASPORISTS

I CANNOT THINK OF a time in this century when the brightest painters and sculptors have been quite as reticent as they are right now. Even artists who do put pen to paper are by and large steering clear of broad, general statements. The very idea of speculating about the nature of art or the future of art can seem suspect to any artist who has watched with horror in recent years as the intricacies and the particularities that give a painting or sculpture its freestanding power have been swept aside by the critical-theory freaks, the p.c. goody goodies, and the Warholesque art market agit-proppers.

This unwillingness to think about art in general, which you find among so many serious artists, is understandable, but it is also dangerous. No art can survive very long without trumpeting the news of where it has come from and where it is going. We will find ourselves in deep trouble indeed if the artists on whom the survival of painting and sculpture depends refuse to speak out or are drowned out when they do.

This century has been as rich in great painting and sculpture as any that anybody has ever seen, and as it comes to its close we naturally want commentary and exegesis. It is not hard to see that painting and sculpture in the past hundred years have absorbed (and provoked) more seismic shifts in structure and meaning than in any comparable period of time since the Renaissance. But only the artists who have put in long days in the studio, who are literally inside this messy story, can tell you what it means to be dealing not only with those shifts, but also with the aftershocks, which just go on and on.

If there is anything that artists are sure about now, it is that there are no reliable maps. Although the monuments still miraculously stand (their foundations are that deep), there is no dependable perspective on them, no preferred or assured best view. And at a time when artists have been been forced to admit that they are not all that sure about their footing, there is nothing to do but make a virtue of uncertainty.

R.B. Kitaj is the only contemporary artist who has had the nerve to write openly and unabashedly about the uncertainty that dominates an artist's studio today. Kitaj's *First Diasporist Manifesto*, a small book published in 1989, is fascinatingly personal, a bold patchwork of assertions and speculations. The book is the confession of a brilliant middle-aged man who has begun to be very interested in his Jewishness. Even some people who are sympathetic to Kitaj's work feel that he may push too hard on his analogy between a painter of our time and a Jew of the Diaspora, both of whom try to sustain a tradition while aware that they are far from its center, or that the center may indeed be gone for good; but at a time when no general theory will any longer do, Kitaj's way of personalizing tradition rings true.

In his paintings, Kitaj is a connoisseur of shattered structures and anticlassical juxtapositions that gain force from the conservative power of his draftsmanship. In his manifesto, he describes the mind of the artist who paints this way. Kitaj believes that the artist of our time is feeling "uneasy, alert to his new freedom, groundless, even foreign." I believe that this sense of unease, of groundlessness as freedom, informs much of what is most heartfelt and forceful in contemporary art.

The point is that each artist feels a long way from any mainstream tradition. The process of squaring new circumstances with old beliefs can yield ruptures and discontinuities that become the only tradition that anybody any longer really knows. I think I can discern these themes—loss, uncertainty, the necessity for individual assertion and invention in the face of general confusion—in the work of nearly every contemporary artist whom I admire. That, of course, includes artists whose work looks nothing like Kitaj's and nothing like each other's, but for the moment it will suffice to point to two artists in addition to Kitaj who have announced such concerns in a relatively overt way.

Many of the figures in Trevor Winkfield's recent paintings are jugglers, itinerants, and wanderers. He is in the midst of a cycle of canvases of single figures that includes a gypsy, an aeronaut, a student, and a waiter; if there is a unifying theme here, it is that each of these characters is in a fluid situation. Winkfield's *Gypsy*, which was completed this year, is as ebullient as Kitaj's figures are often saturnine, yet groundlessness is without a doubt one of Winkfield's preoccupations. Winkfield's Gypsy is a campy performer, outfitted in a coat of many-colored leaves, circled by a floating array of antique seating that suggests a vision of tradition as a game of musical chairs; the painting evokes the giddiness of uneasiness.

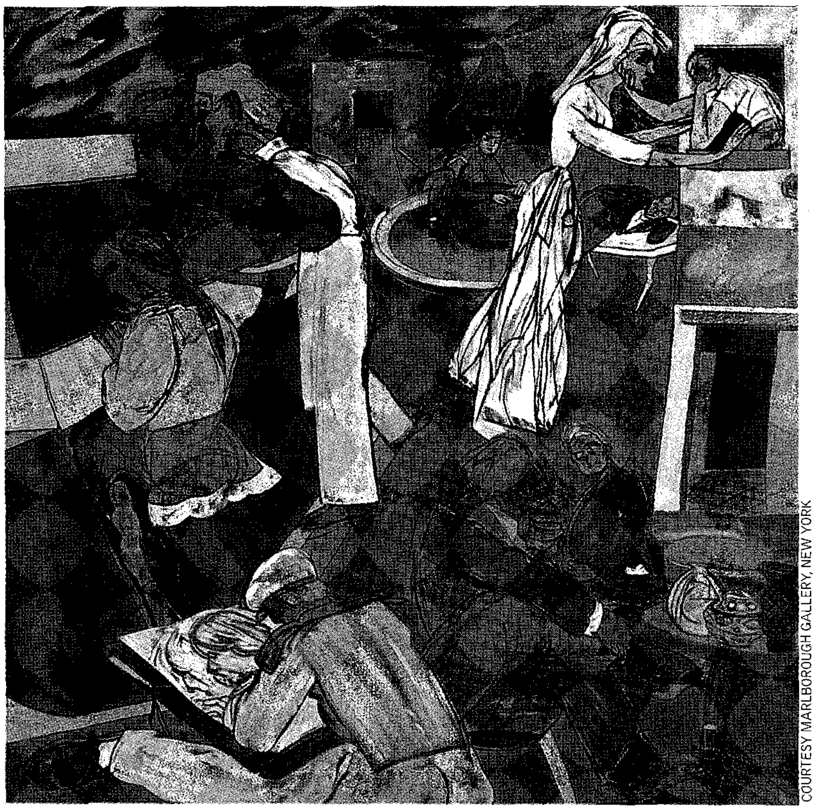
Bill Jensen is another painter who sounds Diasporist themes. In some of his recent abstract paintings, we feel the foreboding that goes with groundlessness, as a singular, complex form, dense yet weightless, floats in a mysterious atmosphere that is neither water nor air. These images are obviously related to a number of statements that Jensen has made, speaking at one point of the value of "groping" toward meaning, and, in a lecture given at the Museum of Modern Art in 1993, observing that "what is seized upon as modern" is "not bound to objects portrayed" but is "feelings in the air."

The uneasy, the groundless, the gypsylike, the feelings in the air—all this, I think, adds up to the sense of history that artists have right now. If artists have come to embrace sensations of unease, of floundering, of confusion, this is because they understand that there is no tried and true way of approaching a past that by now includes every imaginable product of this millennium and all others, and presents them in no single fixed order or hierarchy. You can call this situation pluralist or eclectic; it has been characterized as both modern and postmodern, as both global and nomadic.

Labels are insufficient. Now, more than ever before, artists must map for themselves the ground on which they stand. The thrilling linear vision that was first enshrined in the Renaissance and survived into the progressivist ideas of Mondrian and Clement Greenberg is meaningless today. Now an artist's map of his or her relationship to tradition might seem more like a record of a gypsy's peregrinations, or a chart of what we see when we look through the air and up to the stars and wonder at how our relationship to those faraway bodies is changed by our movements.

In the end, the question is what gets into the art; and in one after another of the most interesting achievements of recent years I see artists finding their way into a territory that is neither exactly representational nor exactly abstract. When the logic of contemporary art strikes with a persuasive originality, the artist has generally found that the only way to move ahead is to forge alliances between forces that have appeared to be irreconcilable. Kitaj, Jensen, and Winkfield fit this description; so do Joan Snyder, Barbara Goodstein, Gabriel Laderman, Leon Kossoff, and any number of other artists.

I am not surprised that the first group of contemporary works in this end-of-century season that has struck me with an authentic force is a series of landscape drawings by Richard Upton that keeps veering from straight observation into an almost neurasthenically refined process of reflection—on the deterioration and the evaporation of form, on weight and inflection not for the purpose of depiction but as distinction for its own sake. While there were also landscape paintings in Upton's show at the Arthur A. Houghton Gallery of Cooper Union in September, he has little feeling for color; his deep oranges and greens are all weighted the same. The drawings were what held me. As is often the case when an artist puts his greatest energy into graphic work, the elegance of the hand risked a kind of intellectual vanity; but in Upton's drawings, vanity becomes delicacy, which fascinates with its careful shadings.


COURTESY MARLBOROUGH GALLERY, NEW YORK

R. B. Kitaj, "Greenwich Village," 1990–93

Perhaps we are at a point where reoccupying one or another tradition is less important than reinventing the connections between several traditions. Shadings are everything. Of course, once you begin to think that the least important thing is to establish precisely where representation ends and abstraction begins, you may imagine that none of this ever mattered anyway; but then that is only the latest demonstration that the sense of the present alters the sense of the past. The artists of the twentieth century have brought us to the point where we now stand through the originality with which they made sense of the art of the entire millennium—and the millennium before this one, too.

To stop and think about centuries and millennia is far more than a p.r. gimmick. This is what artists have been doing for a hundred years. If you look at the books and the magazines that artists produced or inspired in the first half of the century—*Der Blaue Reiter* or *Cahiers d'Art*—you see an opening-up of taste that destabilizes chronology and geography. One millennium wasn't enough. The creator as Diasporist, as gypsy, as a person groping with feelings in the air: these conceptions of the artist's vocation were set on their way by the very richness of modern art. Picasso and Matisse looked to Africa and Byzantium for examples that might strengthen their hand as they debated the values of the Renaissance. By now the debate between Greece and Africa or Raphael and Byzantium has run its course, but the power of Greece or Africa, of Byzantium or the Renaissance, is undiminished. All choices are open; the question is how you knit together your choices. If our period is ultimately considered a remarkable one, it will be because it has been the age of idiosyncratic artists, when the view of tradition became unprecedentedly personal.

THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT

IN CHELSEA, New York's latest art neighborhood, the facilities are often far more interesting than the art that is on display. There is a carefully cultivated nobody's-home look to these fashionable spaces, and the look is more revealing than the people in charge imagine.

Many different kinds of work are exhibited in the galleries of Chelsea, an area that is centered between 10th and 11th Avenues and runs from 14th Street up to, say, 26th Street. Some work is better. Some is worse. But basically Chelsea is the vacuum that has been left by the Diasporization of contemporary art. The few things that anybody really remembers from Chelsea—such as Richard Serra's *Torqued Ellipses*, shown at Dia in 1997; or Ellsworth Kelly's *Sculpture for a Large Wall*, from 1957, exhibited at Matthew Marks in 1998—are by artists who made their reputations eons ago, and stand for an old-modern purity that is not only alien to Chelsea but has been swept aside by Diasporism.

Still, Chelsea is a spectacular vacuum. Paula Cooper's barnlike quarters, with a soaring, angled ceiling, is a fabulous theatrical interior. The deep, wide space that Matthew Marks has on 22nd Street is entered directly from the sidewalk, and there is excitement to the feeling that this elegantly severe gallery is almost an extension of the street. There are plenty of less prepossessing spaces in Chelsea, but the ones that define the mood are the big ones, and there the art is just an accent, a comment.

At Paula Cooper in October, the French artist-composer Céleste Boursier-Mongenot set up inflatable kiddie pools, full of moving water and floating bowls, and as the pieces of crockery hit one another there was a tinkling that, echoing through Cooper's vast cubic footage, turned into a bell-like cacophony. At Matthew Marks, Lucian Freud's *Parts of Leigh Bowery* was all that there was on the first, vast wall. Bowery's penis was front and center in a fancy frame, clearly visible from the street, and who could doubt that it was there for the benefit of Mayor Giuliani?

When Matthew Marks sticks private parts in public places, he is doing what Chelsea often does to fill the vacuum, which is offer a definition of style that is neither more nor less than what the culture already knows. No wonder that photography, in one way or another, is the coin of exchange in Chelsea. Good painting is today almost the definition of a Diasporist activity, while what passes for gallery-friendly photography offers the comfort of being pretty much indistinguishable from what you see in the splashiest spreads in mainstream magazines such as *Vogue* or *Details,* and completely indistinguishable from what you see in Italian *Vogue* or *Visionaire.* Actually, there is more theatrical tension and articulated irony in the plush Annie Leibovitz photographs of Puffy Combs in the October issue of *Vogue* than in any photographs that I have seen recently in Chelsea.

Collier Schorr's color photographs of adolescent boys, in a show at 303 with the *impossibly silly title* "Excuse me while I kiss the sky"—Jimi Hendrix lyrics don't stand well on their own—are Bruce Webers without the avidity of Weber's eye. Among the 40 by 50 inch Fuji c-prints in Mitch Epstein's show of New York photographs at Brent Sikkema was a picture featuring a huge Calvin Klein billboard advertising men's briefs, with, below it, four ordinary folk looking off in different directions. In another Epstein photograph a woman with a shopping bag from Henri Bendel gives a light to the kind of guy who might work for a messenger service. I imagine that Epstein believes that he is commenting on Calvin Klein and Bendel, but all he is really doing is giving their ad campaigns an extra-cool twist. I was reminded of CK's home furnishings line at Joy Episalla's show at Debs and Co., which included big, slightly fuzzy photographs of white pillows. The fact that Episalla's pillows were stained only gave the shots an edgier look; this was the CK ad for *Wallpaper.*

The problem in Chelsea is not that many of the artists would probably rather be in *Vogue* than in a gallery anyway; the trouble is that they do not know that there is a difference. These artists do not have influences, they have sources—as if acquiring a style were as easy as looking up a particular kind of fabric in the Where To Buy pages of the shelter magazines. Hiroshi Sunairi's show at Andrew Kreps, called "Deception," consisted of free form collages in which a lot of the elements are snapshots of young, good-looking Asian men with nothing much on. The way Sunairi layers and juxtaposes elements suggests that he has looked at the work of Jess, the eccentric San Francisco painter and collagist, for a minute or two. But this is Jess without the obsessiveness, without the loopy narrative detailing. Hans Accola, who showed photographs and sculpture at Derek Eller, might have once seen a Rudy Burckhardt movie about New York, considering the way he arranges his snapshots of rushing cars and city streets in casually repeating images; but Accola lacks Burckhardt's imperturbability, the dry wit with which Burckhardt (who died last summer) faced the too romantic onslaught of the city. Accola tries too hard to be cool. A shattered cinder-block, titled *Untitled (foot),* is the kind of avant-garde hokum to which Burckhardt might have given a special ironic spin.

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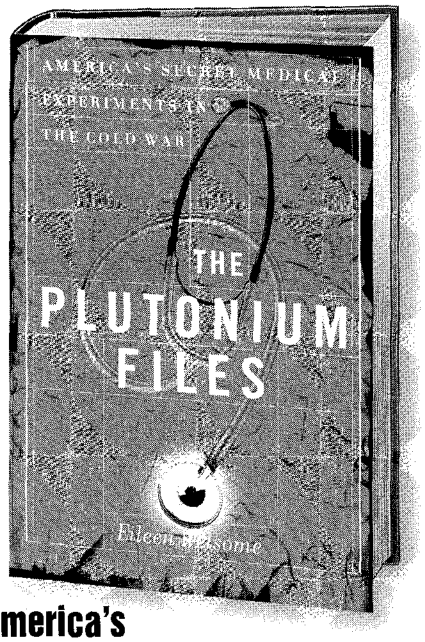

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THE DIAL PRESS

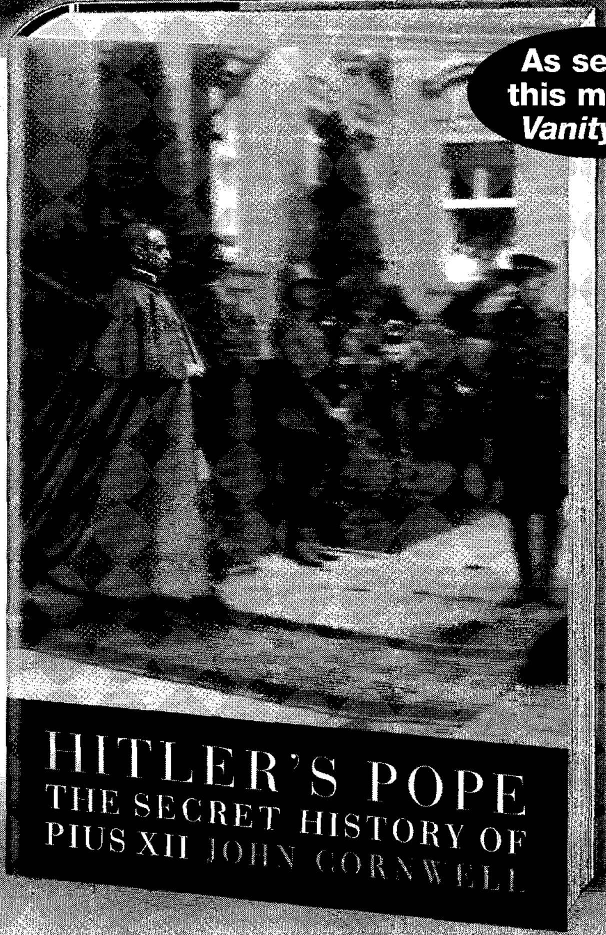
For a decade now, the themes in the most talked-about art in New York have been circling back to adolescent angst, no-composition, abjection, attenuation, scatterings, smatterings, fraud-as-truth. The likelihood is that for the forseeable future these will remain the preferred themes in Chelsea and everywhere else. The bottom line is that the stuff sells. A sculpture by Robert Gober, who used to exhibit at Paula Cooper and has built a world-class reputation on the proposition that nothing-much is what people want to see, sold at Christie's last spring for close to $800,000. Titled *Untitled,* it is a leg and foot, made in wax, with real hair and a real shoe and a candle sticking out of it. Robert Gober is a Dadaist; he may even be a clever one. And Dada has become the mainstream, which proves nothing except that contemporary culture has found a way to fill the vacuum left by Diasporism with the vacuum called "anti-art."

Hans Accola's cinder-block foot, also titled *Untitled*, is a mere $1,900, or at least it was the other day. The person who buys it and later sells it at a profit may believe that all is well in the world, and who am I to say otherwise? Why the audience doesn't know that it's being had, I can't say. The closest I can come to an explanation is that nobody ever told them what art was in the first place. So much for college degrees. I find myself falling back on old-fashioned explanations. The teachers who once bored students with lessons about verse forms and the difference between Renaissance art and Baroque art (circles for Renaissance, ovals for Baroque) were long ago sent packing or died out. The new, better educators never arrived. While the strongest artists around are dreaming up their own, go-it-alone sense of history and tradition, the Chelsea audience by and large hasn't got a clue as to what tradition was in the first place.

The Chelsea attitude is denial. This denial can send a chill up your spine once you have realized that the big players in the neighborhood don't even know what they are against. I believe that this is the purest negativity that we have ever seen in the art community, which is saying a lot. The big Chelsea events—such as the Matthew Barney show at Barbara Gladstone that included bits of glassware and live poultry—have no composition, no structure, no emotion, not even any irony to speak of. Yet damned if the neighborhood isn't full of foreign tourists and local aficionados. I guess this is just the way that high-end mall rats now choose to fill an afternoon. In Chelsea they see the same attitudes that they see in the downtown clothing stores and in the movies, and this doesn't bother them since they never expected much from art anyway.

OVER THE SUMMER, I found myself telling people that if they wanted to know what was going on in Chelsea they could save themselves the trouble by checking out *The Blair Witch Project*. The movie includes all the Chelsea themes, which are themes that the artists picked up elsewhere in the first place: the whimpering mess of teens and twentysomethings who can't get their acts together; the hip look of having no look to speak of. If the art community has not yet embraced this crazily successful movie, it must be because they are jealous. What amateurism-for-art's-sake video exhibited in Chelsea has grossed even a fraction of the $100 million that *The Blair Witch Project* took in in its first weeks?

Three film students go off into the woods to make a documentary about a legendary witch, and the film consists of



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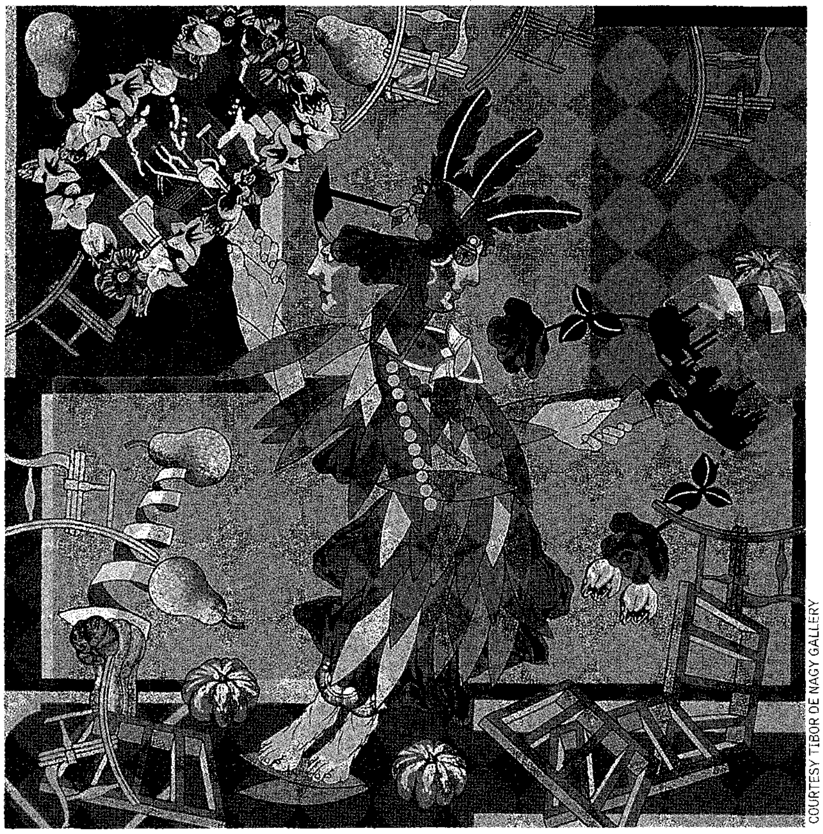
the footage that they shot, found a year after their disappearance. The audience is immediately attracted by the movie's aggressively low-tech look; they understand that there is such a thing as the fascination of lousiness. But if the movie throws people off guard and even scares them, it is because while they may be familiar with the no-art art look, they are unfamiliar with its relentlessness. There is no constructed drama or suspense in the entire eighty-odd minutes of *Blair*; the amateurism is never shaped into something surprisingly beautiful or strange. It is the insistence of the negations that puts people on edge.

The misery of *The Blair Witch Project* is in how relentlessly anti-visual the whole thing is. This is an afternoon in Chelsea turned into a horror movie. The team responsible for the movie knows all the Chelsea angles. The movie is full of art school touches. The signs that the witch leaves out for those three traumatized kids—twigs tied together and hung in trees; piles of leaves and gunk near their tent—are just recaps of 1960s or 1970s environmental and site-specific work. A little Ana Mendieta here, a little Richard Tuttle there. The witch's house is the kind of dilapidated building that Gordon Matta-Clark would have liked to cut up. But why not cut up people and call it Body Art? By the end of the movie you're right there with the victims, in the corner staring at nothing. Then you're dead. I sat through the whole thing without a flicker of anxiety. I know why. Chelsea had prepared me.



COURTESY TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY

Trevor Winkfield, "The Gypsy," 1999

KUNSTHALLE

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO the stand-alone integrity of art? In New York, of all places, the tightly focused one-person gallery show, if by no means extinct, certainly seems to be regarded as out of date. Diasporism and commercialism have in their very different ways contributed to this debacle. As the artists have become too idiosyncratic for most art professionals to really understand, the whole art scene has been sold off to the highest bidder. And now we realize that something that once struck us as the most natural thing in the world, such as the ambition of an artist to hang up a dozen paintings in a gallery every few years, was in fact the product of a long historical struggle to reject the elbow-pushing of official salons and international expositions. Our triumph is now unravelling before our very eyes. Note the growing prominence, in New York as well as internationally, of huge high-profile art fairs, where dealers take booths, fill them with ultra-fancy miscellanies, and compete for public attention in an atmosphere of attention-grabbing gambits.

John Elderfield, the Chief Curator at Large at the Museum of Modern Art, is the man in charge of "Modern*Starts*," a new installation of the museum's core collection of work between 1880 and 1920 which inaugurates a seventeen-month cycle of events at the museum under the general rubric MOMA 2000. This is in its own way a millennial show, for what we are seeing are the curators' first thoughts about how the museum means to present its collection in the building that will begin construction in 2001. The salient fact is that Elderfield has broken with chronology as he rearranges the Modern's holdings. The show takes us backwards—to the free-for-all of the nineteenth-century salons.

The break with chronology is a fundamental assault on the artist-based view, for the curator is arguing that we do not necessarily need to be guided by the artist's development. And in place of the stripped-down way of presenting art that was meant to emphasize what painters and sculptors did, we find a more aggressive kind of installation, that emphasizes the curator's feelings about the past. In one of the central galleries in "Modern*Starts*"—which is filled with sculpture, much of it by Rodin and Matisse, and painted a deep green—Elderfield seems to moon over what he imagines was the wonderfully dark-toned atmosphere of turn-of-the-century France. Elderfield is saying goodbye to the Modern's legendary stark installations.

Meanwhile, over at the Whitney, where the second half of "The American Century: Art and Culture 1900-2000" is now on view, the look of mid-century galleries is part of what is being remembered. One of the subjects of the second part of the Whitney Museum's "American Century" show is installations past. There is a partial reconstruction of a 1950 show of Jackson Pollock at Betty Parsons, complete with small, square canvases stacked on top of one another. Elsewhere, in what is probably the most successful room at the Whitney, paintings and sculptures of the '60s are gathered for a sort of reconstruction of legendary Minimalist exhibitions of the time, such as "Black, White and Gray" at the Wadsworth Atheneum or "Primary Structures" at the Jewish Museum. The Pollock installation, more close-packed and keyed to the architecture than we might have imagined, suggests less of an insistence on the individuality of the canvases than purists would now like to see. But could it be that reconstructions always underscore a theatrical, decorative quality? To resurrect the past is to put it in a frame.

When curators at the Whitney and the Modern set out to interpret the past, they cannot help but rethink their own institutions, which are a part of that history. For the Whitney, "The American Century" is only the most recent installation in the museum's old struggle to figure out if we love American art for its freestanding value or for what it tells us about the country. There is nothing but business as usual in the storm of criticism that has greeted this show. I seem to be virtually alone in believing that the first half of "The American Century," organized by Barbara Haskell, was inspired populist museumship—a balanced, dramatically persuasive answer to a two-part question. The second half, organized by Lisa Phillips, is another matter. Phillips maintains a fairly complex historical tapestry in the 1950s, but by the time that Warhol hits in the '60s we are expected to believe that Pop Art obliterated popular culture as well as any other culture, and we are on a walk down the hellish corridor that is Whitney Biennial Memory Lane.

IN PLANNING "Modern*Starts*," John Elderfield had the immense advantage of working with an institution which for much of its history has known its own mind, yet the show seems fuelled by a fear that what this museum was will no longer do. "Modern*Starts*" is at once a salute to the Modern's holdings, which include Gibraltars such as Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* and Matisse's *Red Studio*, and an attempt to re-imagine that collection. Elderfield characterizes "Modern*Starts*" as "an unconventional guide" to the period 1880-1920, "and not only because it includes some earlier and some later works." The show "contains virtually all of the well-known monuments of this period in the Museum's collection," but "they are not confined to their usual places." As I write, only one of the three floors of "Modern*Starts*," called "People," is up. "Places" and "Things" open in the next few weeks. But you can already get a sense of what Elderfield has in mind. He is the presiding figure in this project, joined by Peter Reed, Mary Chan and Maria del Carmen González.

The show's title, with its double meanings, gives an inkling of how ambitious—and how confused—this project is. "Modern" functions both as the name of a museum and the name of a movement, while "Starts" can be read both as a verb and as a noun, which turns "Modern" into an adjective. This doubling—and tripling—of meanings is either playful or ambiguous, but then the show that Elderfield has masterminded is both those things. He observes in the introduction to the catalogue that "in fact, the usual places—the customary typologies, which bear names such as Fauvism, Cubism, and Futurism—are largely absent. So too is the usual path, a single, generally chronological route through these usual places. Instead, there are many different pathways to be explored; over twenty, in fact."

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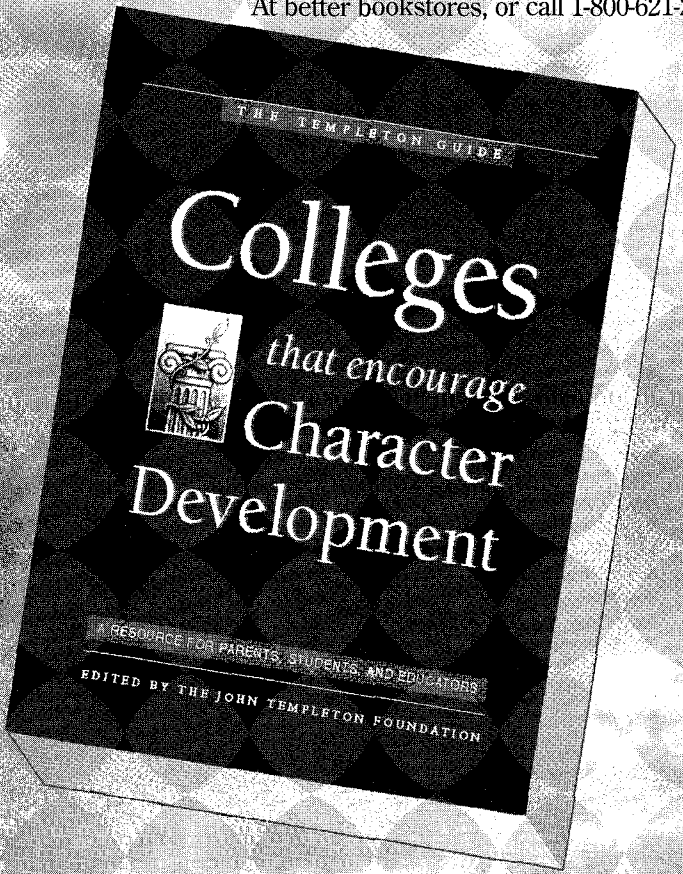
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it is impossible to miss the seriousness of Elderfield's challenge to the old mainstream modern idea. He must know that many artists are thinking of themselves as Diasporists, as gypsies, as grasping for feelings in the air; he knows there can be no question that painters and sculptors have strayed from the good old modern paths, if in fact such paths ever existed. The paths that Elderfield offers each "take the viewer through a group of works roughly similar in subject matter, and each is entirely independent and self-sufficient, which means that viewers may take them in any order, constructing from them their own larger routes in different ways." A Diasporist vision, you might say.

Scrambling is an operative idea in "Modern*Starts*." This is a factor in "The American Century," too. Reshuffling the deck has its usefulness. Barbara Haskell enriched our feeling for classic works with some of her juxtapositions. I was glad to see Edward Hopper's *New York Movie*, with its downcast usher, next to some glossy photographs of '30s movie stars. I liked seeing Gerald Murphy's streamlined abstractions next to some of the Art Deco objects that might have inspired them. At the Modern, similarly, I am delighted by a wall devoted to images of the turn of-the-century artist, including work by Picasso, Munch, and Heckel. Like Haskell, Elderfield sometimes has a feeling for period mood. Elderfield's room devoted to theatrical images, with Bakst's portrait of Nijinsky, a Seurat concert drawing, a poster by Chéret, a singer by van Dongen, and an actor by Matisse is genuine fun.

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The atmospheric juxtapositions in "Modern*Starts*" and "The American Century" may feel new to New Yorkers, but to museumgoers who in recent years have been through some of the big shows mounted at the Pompidou Center in Paris or the Palazzo Grassi in Venice, a lot of these museological methods will be familiar. In Europe, the tradition of the Kunsthalle—a venue for exhibitions that is not tied to a museum with a standing collection and a curatorial staff—has encouraged a thematically freewheeling and brashly theatrical style of presentation that has links to the fairs, the salons and the expositions of earlier centuries. At the Pompidou Center in Paris and the Palazzo Grassi in Venice, virtuoso curators such as Pontus Hulten and Jean Clair have used broad themes such as "the city" and "the body" to create huge exhibitions that combine cutting-edge scholarly ideas with crowd-friendly presentations.

This approach is not unknown in the United States. Hulten mounted "The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age" at the Modern back in 1968. Thomas Krens has flirted with Kunstalle ideas at the Guggenheim, especially in a show of modern Italian art. And now John Elderfield seems to be giving more than passing attention to the techniques of Jean Clair. One of the opening juxtapositions in "People"—of a huge Maillol nude silhouetted against Barnett Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*—is the kind of razzmatazz installation with symbolic overtones (male and female principles and so forth) that would have fit right into "Identity and Alterity," Clair's extravaganza at the Venice Biennale in 1995. That show, which retold the story of twentieth century art in terms of the figure, could have been an inspiration for the "People" floor of "Modern*Starts*."

If Elderfield did in fact have Clair's "Identity and Alterity" in mind, I think he made a big mistake. "Modern*Starts*" is going to go down in history as the show at the Museum of Modern Art in which the museum's curators began to wonder if abstract art actually exists. I agree with Elderfield that this museum has often been too quick to dismiss representational art that did not fit into its abstraction-friendly scheme. Yet an exhibition in which everything that Mondrian, Kandinsky, and Malevich did before 1920 is reshuffled into slots labelled "People," "Places," and "Things" is not an improvement. There are change-everything moments in art, and they should be respected. Elderfield will argue that he has reconnected abstraction to the real world, but in the process of defying the matter-of-fact logic of chronology, Elderfield has downplayed Kandinsky's and Mondrian's defiance of reality.

Elderfield's loopier history, with its twenty pathways, is an attempt to overcome the wearisome sense of history as a chain reaction that could turn the old galleries at the Modern into rigid pedagogy. Yet Fauvism and Cubism, those movements that are sliced and diced in Elderfield's scheme, are not textbook devices; they are fairly complex ways of describing a process that went on in the minds of a particular group of artists at a particular time. When Elderfield juxtaposes Picasso's *Nude with Joined Hands* (1906) with Matisse's *Bather* (1909), he is showing two artists who are moving toward increased abstraction—or at least increased simplification—in the same way at roughly the same time. But many of Elderfield's juxtapositions, and even the best ones, no matter how well they spin the period mood, fail to illuminate the imagination of the individual artist. I have the same problem with Elderfield's approach that I have had with Jean Clair's. I cannot see the art for the workings of the curator's brain.

CHARDIN'S DESPAIR

THE SEASON NOW beginning in New York is going to be framed by exhibitions of work by two Frenchmen who are among the greatest artists of the eighteenth century. The Frick Collection now has on view "Watteau and His World," an exhibition that includes some three dozen drawings by this master who died in 1721 at the age of thirty-six. In June, the Chardin retrospective, commemorating his birth 300 years ago, comes to the Metropolitan.

Chardin, whose last American retrospective was in Boston in 1979, is one of the avatars of modernity. Without the rock-solid inevitability of his compositions, it is impossible to imagine Cézanne. Watteau put elusive shades of feeling—which are anything but unfamiliar to us—under the microscope, with his soft yet astonishingly forceful draftsmanship and paint handling. Both his art and his brief, enigmatic life—a life that fascinated Pater, Proust, and others—have mesmerized American artists at least since the 1980s, when there was a great retrospective in Washington. Each of these artists had a peculiar, original, at-an-angle relationship to the official art world of his time. There is a sense in which neither of them ever quite fit, which explains why contemporary artists, living at a time when no artist who is very good ever quite fits, regard Watteau and Chardin with a particular attentiveness.

Although Watteau and Chardin created some of the most enduring images in European painting, neither of them had much luck when it came to altering the terms in which art was understood in their own times. Watteau's paintings of aristocrats and theater people lazing about in parks were so revolutionary that the Academy had to invent a new category of painting, the *fêtes galantes*, so that he could be admitted. Near death, Watteau painted the *Shopsign*, a view of the interior of a picture shop that announces the painting of everyday life as a grand subject; it is in some way unrivaled even by the achievements of Courbet, Manet, Degas, and Seurat.

Yet two decades after his death, even Watteau's admirers were inclined to judge him by the standards of an Academy that his art had rendered irrelevant. His friend Caylus regretted that his paintings "do not express the activity of any passion, and are thus deprived of one of the most affecting aspects of painting, that is, of action." And Gersaint, for whom Watteau had painted the *Shopsign*, wished that Watteau's early studies had been "devoted to history painting."

As for Chardin, this artist who served both as treasurer of the Academy and supervised the hanging of the Salons, he could not teach in the Academy because he had been admitted not as a painter of

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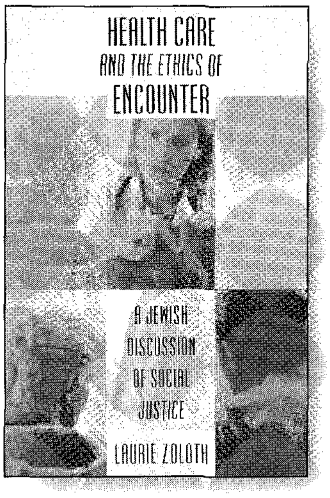

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the figure but as painter "in the domain of animals and fruits." Although he devised the greatest compositions in French art between Poussin and Cézanne, he was not felt to be equipped to teach others. He died in 1779, out-of-fashion, an irrelevance in the face of a rising Neoclassicism.

We would do well to remember the checkered experiences of these greats, for our idea of artistic success is all too firmly grounded in the bewilderingly immense triumphs that artists such as Matisse and Picasso had in New York, where they went from dissidents at the Armory Show to institutional pillars of the Museum of Modern Art and stayed there. Such change-everything success is by no means the norm. The success of Picasso, Matisse, and others created a belief that quality is easily reconciled with power, glamour, and money. And now, although the fate of the best artists is certainly closer to that of Chardin than to that of Matisse, the audience cannot bear to believe that the times have changed. People are willing to accept as truly important whatever the powers that be deem sufficiently glamorous and salable. And so we have Robert Gober's leg.

WATTEAU AND CHARDIN are easy to love, but their lives ought to serve as a warning to anybody who is inclined to believe that they did everything better in days of yore. John Elderfield, for one, seems to be developing quite a nostalgia for the old ways. When he installed the Bonnard retrospective at the Modern in 1998, he insisted on splitting the artist's dreamily magnificent interiors into groupings of still lifes and figures, as if those academic divisions were not one of the things for which Bonnard had no use. Now, in "Modern*Starts*," he has reinvented the academic division of art into figure, landscape, and still life that once marginalized Watteau and robbed Chardin of a teaching position. I know that Elderfield's motives are honorable. He wants to combat the kind of programmatic abstract thinking that rejects representational variety. But Elderfield's idea of progress has a reactionary undertow. And so the Museum of Modern Art is looking plenty confused.

How could it look otherwise? You might say that Elderfield and his colleagues at the Modern are taking upon themselves the prerogatives of the Diasporist artist, scrambling the monuments in a way that works for them. Such subjectivity is understandable, but whether it is reconcilable with the grave curatorial responsibilities of an institution such as the Modern is another question. For artists who have for decades gone through the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, taken note of what was wrong, then gone back to their studios and tried to right those wrongs, there may be some justification in saying, as Picasso once did, that a museum is "just a lot of lies," and leaving the old lies alone.

Artists must find their own truth in the studio, anyway. The miracle is that they are still managing to do so, despite Chelsea and all that it implies. Last spring, at 55 Mercer, Joshua Dorman, a painter in his early thirties, had a show that, while not in any way fully resolved, revealed an artist who is beginning to make his own kind of sense of things. In Dorman, there is a dark-toned landscapist at war with a thoughtful dreamer-up of abstract worlds—a pretty good conflict for an artist to have. A wall in Dorman's show with 365 tiny paintings, one done each day of the year, struck me, despite some lovely moments, as a bit of a gimmick. But in a strange self-portrait (which reveals the artist's own bodiless head lying in a field) and another visionary fantasy, this one full of flickery light and called *World Without Time*, Dorman lays claim to his own kind of romantic spirit and begins to face the facts of his personal Diaspora.

In a sense, I guess, Watteau and Chardin were Diasporists, too. Watteau avoided fixed addresses, painted anywhere, was a great improviser. As for Chardin, in 1765 he made one of the more startlingly harsh estimates of the artist's life to ever come from a painter's lips. His biographers believe that these words are related to the situation of his son, an aspiring painter who was finding it impossible to take hold of his talent and ultimately committed suicide. When Chardin spoke at the Salon, he evoked the "torment" of the artist's life. He described the years of hard labor, drawing from the model, after which "we are left to fall back on our talent if we have any. And talent is not revealed at once. Its presence or absence is not decided at the first attempt. And how many attempts, both good and bad, we have to make."

Painting, Chardin argued, is always a gamble. Thousands of painters, he said, "have broken their paintbrushes between their teeth in despair at not being able to do any better." Yet this is how it must be. "The painter who has never been aware of the difficulties of art will never do anything worth while." Those are not the words of a romantic or a nihilist. They are the words of a man who found himself in many respects at odds with the institutions in which he passed his life as an artist. Perhaps this is why his cry strikes with such force now. All the artists I know believe that they are working within a system that has failed. The difficulties only increase. ■

ArtScenes

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The latest trends in apocalypse.

The Varieties of Millennial Experience

By ANTHONY GRAFTON

I.

ALBRECHT DÜRER KNEW the end was coming as surely as any bearded sandwich man or pony-tailed television producer knows it now. True, he could not tell exactly when the skies would open, Antichrist would appear, stars would fall, mountains would collapse, or the Four Horsemen would ride. But the Revelation of Saint John—a text which he not only knew intimately, but illustrated with a magnificent and frightening series of woodcuts—taught him that this scarifying sequence of events would certainly unfold someday. History would reach its climax and its end.

Visions of the future transformation of the heavens and the earth haunted this master of the precise representation of the here and now. He saw them not only while he was awake and reading the Bible, but even when he slept, in a dream—as he recorded in a note—of "great waters" that "fell from heaven," first with "an equal slowness" and then "with such swiftness, with wind and roaring, and I was so sore afraid that when I awoke my whole body trembled.... So when I arose in the morning I painted it above here as I saw it. God turns all things to the best."

Like most of his contemporaries, Dürer did not confine himself to the New Testament when he looked for ways to predict the date of the celestial and terrestrial revolutions that he awaited. His dream of a flood was prompted not by the sermons of dour theologians on the Book of Revelation, but by the popular pamphlets known as almanacs and prognostications, which peddlers hawked in the streets and squares of every European city. The authors of these crudely illustrated little books on bad paper, the distant ancestors of the newspaper, noted that a dangerous conjunction of the planets would take place in Pisces in 1524. Theological and historical pessimists among them—then as now, the majority—naturally predicted that this celestial sign heralded a second Flood.

Dozens of booklets repeated the prediction, mingling precise details of planetary positions with a threatening, prophetic language of threat and hope. In parts of Italy, people fled the cities for high ground—only to return, sheepishly, when no flood took place. Dürer not only read such books and broadsheets, he also helped to produce them: one of his most famous woodcuts illustrated the disastrous planetary conjunction which had, supposedly, brought the new disease of syphilis into being.

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Jerry B. Jenkins
(Tyndale House, 419 pp., $19.97)

Dürer's dream of the flood, in other words, reflected his fascination with what the Christian Scriptures foretold. But it also resulted from his involvement in the popular culture of his day. The flood of 1524 that never happened became the first media event of modern times; and in Dürer's unconscious life it mingled easily with passages from the Bible. No wonder that he paid attention in 1503 to what he called "the greatest miracle that I have seen in all my days ... when crosses fell on many people, but more on children than other people," and sketched a record of what these miraculous images looked like: dark, vague, curiously modern silhouettes of Jesus on the cross, flanked by the Virgin and Mary Magdalene, mourning. The artist and his learned friends had many reasons to think that time itself might soon run out—even if most of them hesitated to fix the year and day when this would happen.

IN THE 1950s and the 1960s, Dürer's dreams—and the eschatological fears and hopes, the ancient astrological computations and celestial prodigies that inspired them—seemed very distant indeed. But new kinds of scholarly research were shedding light on their origins and their meanings. The historian Norman Cohn devoted a brilliant, frightening book, which appeared in 1957, to *The Pursuit of the Millennium.* He traced the development of Western visions of the end. He found their roots in Hebrew prophecy and Zoroastrian visions of the final combat, their immediate sources in the Book of Daniel and other prophetic texts composed in Hellenistic times by Jews and Chaldeans. And he treated the book of Revelation, written for Christians in the time of Nero's persecution, as the decisive text—the point at which the intoxicating traditions fused and crystallized into something new and potentially explosive.

Cohn quoted from John's frightening vision of the Apocalypse, which he called "an eschatological prophecy of great poetic power." He confronted readers with the strange beasts and ravening creatures, natural catastrophes and dizzying omens that would ramp and rage across the earth before Christ returned to rule the world with his faithful for a thousand years—as well as the definitive struggle and victory that would take place after that. What mattered about them, he argued, was not only the details of their presentation, but also their shattering, galvanizing emotional impact. As early as the middle of the second century, Cohn explained, the "fiercely ascetic" Montanist movement, whose ecstatic, visionary followers thought the New Jerusalem would soon descend in Phrygia, showed "how literally people could take this prophecy and with what feverish excitement they could expect its fulfillment." This vision of the vanquished conquered and changed its readers, and had done so from the early Christian centuries to the present.

INCORPORATED IN THE official Christian Scriptures, these lurid predictions proved as subversive in effect as they were canonical in standing. Again and again, they attracted the attention of two dangerous classes: rabid revolutionary intellectuals, mad haters of the existing order in search of an Archimedean social point from which they could move the world; and wretched social outcasts, the sturdy beggars and out-of-work artisans spawned by Europe's cities in times of rapid economic change.

Prophets and crowds—once they found each other—amounted to a kind of human critical mass. Preachers took John's reveries as the precise blueprints for a reconstruction of the world they lived in. They identified themselves as the martyrs, the witnesses whose sufferings on behalf of truth would realize the last phase of God's plan. The innocent blood that they lost sanctified them. More frightening, the guilty blood they shed, that of God's enemies, did the same. Thus the ruthless revolutionary, that terrifying and characteristic figure of modern times, was born. The "urban masses" became his natural constituency, his faithful, long-suffering, ineffective army, and—on the rare occasions when he was lucky enough, and those around him unlucky enough, that he took power—his wretchedly exploited subjects.

From the Crusades and the Flagellant Movement of the Middle Ages to the Anabaptist kingdom of God in Münster in 1534-1535 and beyond, Cohn traced the individuals and movements that tried to realize John's visions of the end. He emphasized their ability to spark bloodshed on a vast scale, as millenarian revolutionaries started quest after quest to purify the world. Scriptural metaphors mattered, because they were taken literally. God, cried John, would rid the grain of tares at harvest time—or, as a later prophet put it,

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foreword by Lynn Goldman

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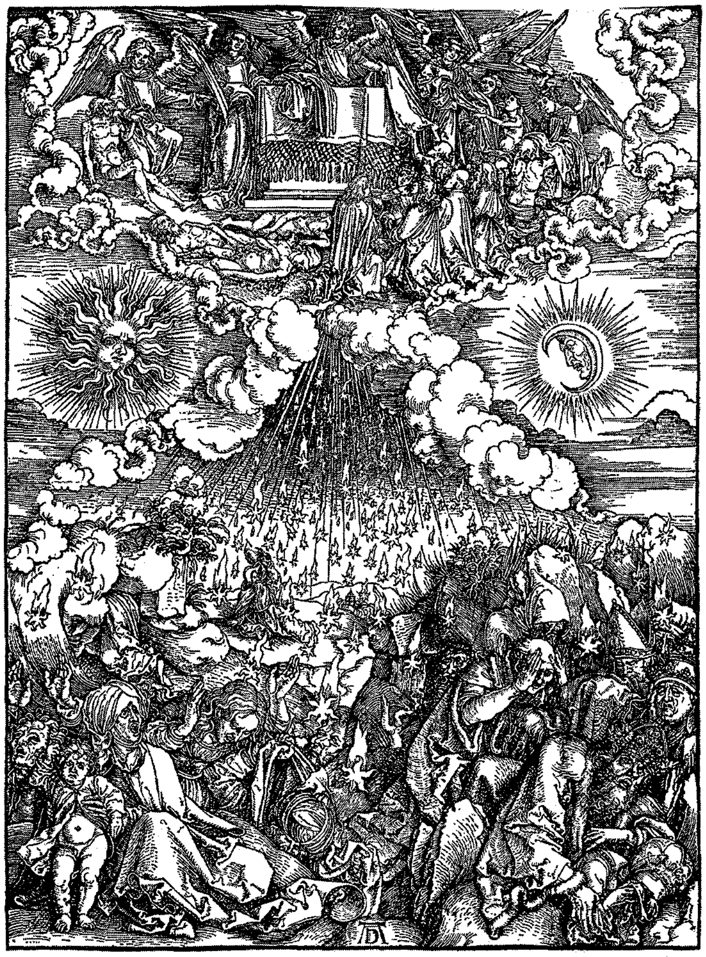
he would trample out the vintage of the grapes of wrath.

This radical language divided the world. It distinguished the saved from the damned. And the inflammable revolutionary public took it not as a prediction of the distant future, but as a call for direct action. Peasants and artisans—so their prophets insisted—must harvest and glean the human race, ridding it of its chaff. The chaff were those who did not accept the divine plan.

For Cohn, in the end, all modern revolutionary movements—including the two central ones of the twentieth century, Nazism and Communism—derived from this millennial Christian tradition of millenarian radicalism. Joachim of Fiore's speculations about world history, Cohn argued, echoed in "the Marxian dialectic of the three stages of primitive communism, class society and a final communism," and the phrase "the third Reich" "would have had but little emotional significance if the phantasy of a third and most glorious dispensation had not, over the centuries, entered into the common stock of European social mythology."



Albrecht Dürer, "The Day of Wrath," 1498

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The two major forms of totalitarianism both represented, in Cohn's account, the re-emergence into history of an ancient "subterranean revolutionary eschatology." When Marx and Lenin, Hitler and Goebbels announced the arrival of a new social order and demanded the extermination of all enemies, they spoke updated secularized versions of an ancient radical language. Baku Commissars and SS-men in the Generalgouvernement—and their rootless, wild followers—were the modern successors of the medieval Taborites and Reformation Anabaptists. This explained—as Cohn wrote in a characteristically eloquent foreword—why a historical enquiry into the roots of millennialism that began in the ruins of Central Europe after World War II had taken him backwards through the entirety of European history. Cohn's work made a powerful case, though it was marred by his exaggerations of the radicalism of some of the medieval and early modern revolutions that he described.

Cohn recounted and deplored many sensational details about nudism, polygamy, and other forms of antinomian behavior in which radical prophets supposedly engaged, drawing mostly on sources written by their enemies. Yet the most striking feature of his work was the long-term continuity that he traced, or seemed to trace. He had apparently identified a coherent, interlocking set of images and social formations, which appeared and reappeared across the centuries and the millennia, and has charged with the same disastrous potential wherever and whenever it surfaced. Like the Oxford Arabist D.S. Margoliouth, who held that all funny stories descended from one of thirty Indo-European Ur-jokes, Cohn taught that a single Christian vision of the end could pass from culture to culture, from language to language, even from religious to secular discourse, without losing either its coherence or its unique ability to inspire the crazed masses to rise up once again. (In later years he would return to this theme, devoting a second study to the Near Eastern and Zoroastrian origins of millennialism.)

Even as the paperback version of Cohn's book introduced hundreds of young students to the millennium and its impoverished, raving pursuers, other scholars were following different paths. They were moving along winding side roads, for the most part, instead of Cohn's highway, which made for slower progress but allowed richer, and more varied views. Even before Cohn wrote, historians of ideas such as Carl Becker, Ernest Tuveson, and Frank Manuel had shown that millennialism took more than one form.

"Pre-millennialist" readers of Revelation stressed the violent confrontations that must precede Christ's return. "Post-millennialist" exegetes, by contrast, argued that Christ would rule in peace for a thousand years before the last battle took place. This view could easily be watered down into a secular doctrine of gradual change and amelioration—as it was in the American doctrine of progress that flourished in the later nineteenth century, or in the colorful doctrines of social evolution developed by Manuel's beloved "prophets of Paris," Comte, Saint-Simon, and Fourier, the last of whom predicted that the socialist millennium would see the oceans turn to lemonade. The latter's "erotic daydreams," his "sham battles of the sexes with captives of love as the reward to the victorious army," are just as genuine an offshoot of the ancient millennial tradition as the visions of final battles that have recently captured historians' attention.

The 1950s, among their many other virtues, saw little millennial activity. Such visions of the end as still existed—Arnold Toynbee's prophecy of the upcoming, irreversible decline of the West, or Nevil Shute's evocation of the upcoming, unavoidable irradiation of the world after nuclear war in his novel *On the Beach*—dropped entirely the imagery of the ancient ones, and also their call for radical change. Millennialism was at most a marginal phenomenon—the property of little-known flying saucer cultists such as those studied by the sociologist Leon Festinger and his colleagues. In a famous study called *When Prophecy Fails*, they showed that the failure of the millennium to arrive did not shatter, but reinforced, the convictions of the true believers. It was not eschatological hunger that fascinated these scholars, but eschatological disappointment.

As the fortunes of the millennium declined, however, the social sciences flowered, and particular instances of millenarian prophecy came in for detailed scrutiny. During the 1490s, for example, the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola tried to persuade the Florentines, of all people, to erect a millennial kingdom of their own. His movement was enforced by youth groups who urged women to give up their vanities, their cosmetics, and their high-heeled shoes, and to pile them on Savonarola's bonfires next to lubricious works of art. And its motive force clearly lay above all in the visions of the millennium that Savonarola expounded to huge crowds in his sermons. Once more, the prophet and the masses collaborated to wreak havoc—or so it seemed.

Donald Weinstein, a meticulous and insightful student of archival documents and literary texts, steeped himself in the images and metaphors of Florentine political language. He showed that Savonarola had not only appealed to the poor boys who wandered the city streets. Many members of the political and social elite found his message plausible, and with good reason. His prophecies—which derived, like Dürer's, from many sources—combined the universal Christian imagery of Revelation with traditional, local images of Florence as a godly city, the home of true religion, and the ally of the holy nation of France.

EVENTUALLY, Savonarola's movement collapsed, thanks to both external and internal pressures. A papal interdict stripped him of much of his elite support. The public trial by ordeal arranged to establish his holiness ended before it began, as rain fell and the participants bickered about whether they could carry relics with them across the hot coals. Captured and tortured, Savonarola confessed that his prophecies had been lies.

Still, many rich and well-educated Florentines continued to believe that he was a divinely appointed prophet. The government called an emergency meeting of power brokers to deal with the interdict, which threatened the property of Florentine merchants and bankers warehoused abroad with confiscation. One participant confessed that he thought Savonarola a holy man and eminently deserving of support. But "since we in Italy are as we are," he advised that the prophet be handed over to his enemies nonetheless, and indeed he was.

In Renaissance Florence, modernity's first home, the proverbial heartland of rational political calculation, the approach of the millennium formed as normal a part of political language as it did in Ronald Reagan's America. Even the rich and the powerful balanced its claims against those of interest, materially understood. Millennial prophecy, it seemed, varied radically in tone, texture, and implication, from place to place and from time to time. Prophets could mix and match the images that they drew from Revelation with other prophetic traditions. Their audiences, more remarkably, included not only crazed beggars who had nothing to lose, but the good and the great, who believed that the world would be transformed even though their material interests might have predisposed them to scoff.

The successes that Savonarola and other prophets of doom enjoyed puzzled even some of their contemporaries. The Neoplatonist philosopher Marsilio Ficino, whose dear friend Pico della Mirandola was buried in the robes of Savonarola's followers, could explain the Dominican's appeal only by arguing that he must have been a demon in human shape. Modern historians could make little more of a radicalism that seemed to lack a reasonable social explanation. And over time, even as they confirmed Norman Cohn's insights about the durability of John's visions, they qualified his social explanations.

HISTORIANS FOUND TRACES of millennial thought in even more surprising places. Christopher Hill—who dedicated a brilliant set of lectures to Antichrist's roles in seventeenth-century England—has argued that leaders of the Puritan Revolution like Oliver Cromwell believed as firmly in the coming of the Lord as the radical Diggers, Ranters, and Fifth-Monarchy Men whom they relentlessly persecuted. "For many centuries," Hill explained, "Antichrist seemed an intensely real and very important person ... when we find that John Pym, Oliver Cromwell, John Lilburne, Gerrard Winstanley, Henry Oldenburg, Secretary of the Royal Society, and the great Sir Isaac Newton himself were all interested in Antichrist, it is clear that there is something important here." More surprisingly still, in doing so the radicals joined hands with their enemies, the Stuart kings—or at least with James I, who in some moods saw himself as the Christian emperor of the last days.

Puritans and Anglicans disagreed with murderous intensity about whether a pious man should keep his hat on in church; but they agreed in their obsessive admiration for the historian of England's heretics and Protestants, John Foxe. And his *Book of Martyrs*—which appeared in 1563 and was chained, by royal decree, in every English church—portrayed England, as Savonarola had Florence, as an elect nation destined to play a special role in the final unfolding of God's plan.

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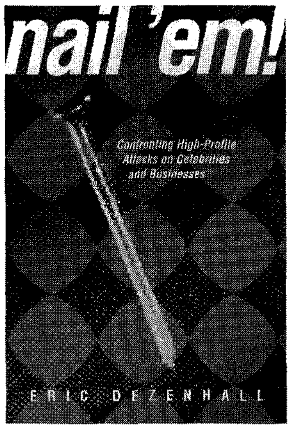
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Even the most elevated victims of Catholic persecution, such as Thomas Cranmer, could play the part of the martyrs who suffered for the truth, and whose sufferings gave drama to the final battle. Ideas and fantasies such as these flourished in the highest quarters. No thesis topic won more enthusiastic approval in Protestant universities than the argument that the Pope himself was Antichrist. After all, Joseph Scaliger, the greatest scholarly figure of the greatest university in Protestant Europe, Leiden, had learned as a young man at Rome that the pope's tiara bore the number *666*, or the sign of the Beast.

Hill, himself an unrepentant radical to this day, sometimes went farther than his evidence would bear. In this case, however, the ground that he helped to open up proved incredibly fruitful. Medievalists such as Marjorie Reeves, Bernard McGinn, and Robert Lerner and Richard Emmerson filled in Cohn's outline with newly precise investigations, some of them so full of curious clues and surprising revelations that they read like detective stories. Detailed monographs traced the development of individual prophecies. These, it turned out, often mutated in tone, content, and imagery as they were copied, plagiarized, recycled and reframed to serve new needs.

NO SINGLE MILLENARIAN pattern emerged as universally valid. Still, it seemed on the whole that most medieval prophets invoked the Apocalypse not to move the poor to social action, but to persuade all Christians to repent. As Augustine had influentially suggested, the real drama of the Apocalypse was personal, not collective. Debates about whether millenarian agitation took place, as historians once proclaimed, before and during the year 1000, may distract readers from a more central point. The medieval millennium was awaited far more widely on a moral and internal plane than as a social event to be brought about by collective action.

The urban plebs melted away under historical inspection like snow in the spring sunlight. Social historians such as Natalie Davis and R. Po-chia Hsia proved that the radical crowds of the Middle Ages and early modern period included a great many highly respectable citizens and drew on established traditions of collective action. More remarkable, the wild-eyed prophets of doom also turned out to belong to many different social and intellectual types. Historians of early modern England—William Haller, William Lamont, J.G.A. Pocock, Blair Worden—explored and debated the apocalyptic dimensions of political thought and action which Hill had brought into prominence. And historians of science such as Frank Manuel and Charles Webster found apocalyptic beliefs in very high quarters indeed.

For the conviction that the end would soon arrive also inspired Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton to create new ways of understanding the natural world. The pursuit of the millennium led to the material iron cage in which the bishop of Münster hung the body of Jan of Leiden, who had created a millennial kingdom in the bishop's rich northwest German city; but it also led to the spiritual iron cage of modern science. The laboratories, the observatories, and the museums that Bacon imagined for his New Atlantis, and that the Royal Society created, were designed to realize a prophecy made in the Book of Revelation's most important Old Testament source, the Book of Daniel: "Many shall go to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased."

Some radical philosophers combined social with intellectual revolution. In the years just before 1600, the Dominican Tommaso Campanella hoped to lead the miserable peasants of his native Calabria in creating a Utopian City of the Sun, and drew on the most up-to-date astrology and astronomy of his time to deconstruct what he saw as the myth of Christ's divinity. Others, Newton most importantly, confined their breaches of decorum to the sphere of the intellect.

II.

BY THE EARLY 1990s, in other words, the millennium was firmly established as a richly mutable object of historical research, one which rewarded study from many different points of view. Scholars realized that millennialists, in the west, were far too diverse to be characterized by simple formulas, and their goals and movements far too complex to be forced into a single analytical pigeonhole.

The university—in America, at least—is another country. Outside the tight little world of scholarly conferences and journals, the end of history, or the end of History, is more than an object of study. This is owed not least to a central fact of American popular culture, which is that in the course of the 1960s and 1970s the millennium came back into the collective consciousness, in a big way. Sometimes it took modernized forms: predictions of ecological disaster or devastating warfare inspired movies such as *Soylent Green* and *Planet of the Apes*, while economic catastrophe was evoked in *The Coming Crash of '79*. Sometimes it updated traditional predictive arts. Haight-Ashbury and a thousand road-company theatres echoed with the modernized astrological scenario for world history: it was the dawning of the age of Aquarius.

In the precincts of fundamentalist Christianity, at the evangelical compounds where earnest prophets deciphered computer bar codes as the Number of the Beast and identified the government's black helicopters as the engines of a secular authority as corrupt as Nero's, the old millennium also came vividly back to life. The Book of Revelation offers the members of such circles exactly what it provided a thousand years ago for the kind of Christian scholar whose folly Saint Augustine had tried to reveal: God's detailed, day-by-day plan for the scourging that the world deserves, and will receive, the encoded but precisely accurate history of the future which is about to come upon us.

Anyone who doubts this—and after Waco and Oklahoma City, few could doubt it—need only read the recent series of "Christian novels" by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. These books start with the Rapture—the disappearance of the truly faithful around the world, who rise, stripped of clothing and possessions, to meet the Lord. And they follow the adventures of the pilot Rayford Steele, and his daughter Chloe, and the Princeton graduate and journalist Cameron "Buck" Williams, and the flight attendant Hattie Durham, and Nicolae Carpathia, the mysterious, charming Romanian leader whose knowledge of languages and passion to create a world government in New Babylon identify him, to readers in the know, as Antichrist. Immured in prose so dry that it is almost petrified, a language without qualities, these texts have the appeal not of fiction, but of secret society cryptography. They confirm the readers' long-held suspicions about Israel and the UN, the American communications élite and the Third World—not to mention the Freemasons and the Bavarian illuminati.

LaHaye and Jenkins show the Apocalypse taking place, seal by seal, with grim literal-mindedness, as the nature of the events and their connections to prophecy slowly become clear to the characters whose romantic adventures they narrate. As Horseman after Horseman spills the blood of humanity, the characters talk and mate, plot and counter-plot before up-to-date scenery made of the best cardboard: flight lounges, suburban houses, and television studios, where the props include bibles with commentary and the most modern forms of electronic technology. It is a grisly mixture of *The Rapture* and *You've Got Mail,* a bizarrely flat and monstrously distorted rendering of the life we live now:

> Rayford was grateful that Chloe had begun getting to know Amanda better by E-mail. When Rayford and Amanda were dating, he had monopolized most of Amanda's time, and while the women seemed to like each other, they had not bonded other than as believers. Now, communicating [not in the technical sense, of course] daily, Amanda seemed to be growing in her knowledge of Scripture. Chloe was passing along everything she was studying. Between Bruce and Chloe, Rayford found his answers about the fifth and seventh seals. It was not pleasant news, but he hadn't expected any different.

But how was your day otherwise, Mrs. Lincoln? It would take a heart stonier than mine to read the death scene of the two witnesses of the Apocalypse, here named Moishe and Eli—two Jews who testify that Christ is the Messiah and work many miracles before being blown away dramatically by Carpathia—without snickering. Yet most readers don't snicker. These snazzily printed novels have reached far more readers than *The Pursuit of the Millennium* and the works of Cohn's successors taken together. Three and a half million copies—not to mention related chatchkes and *Left Behind: The Kids*—have been sold. The most recent volumes have hit the *Times*'s best-seller list, and Amazon.com—which sets *Left Behind* at number 58 in sales—has received reviews from 805 readers for it from around the world, the vast majority of them raving about the qualities of this "must read for all believers and near Christians."

So out there, amid the ceaseless democratic buzz of the Web, on the evangelical call-in shows, in apocalyptic comic books and pamphlets, millennial visions flare and flicker. The most up-to-date of practices offer admittance to the most atavistic of fantasies:

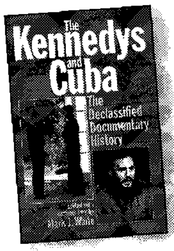
> New World Order Concentration
> Camps and Guillotine Executions!
> Click Here
> And I saw thrones, and they that sat
> on them. And judgment was given to
> them...

The Internet appears to have been invented just in time. Maybe it, too, is a sign....

During the Reformation, Luther's close friends Philip Melanchthon and Caspar Peucer cast horoscopes and scanned Revelation with equal fascination, as Robin Briggs showed in his fine study of *Prophecy and*

Mark J. White, editor

The Kennedys and Cuba



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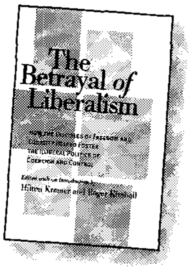
The Betrayal of Liberalism



Nine distinguished contributors examine the liberal ethos today and explain how the pursuit of freedom and equality has helped foster the illiberal politics of coercion and control.

Laurie Winn Carlson

A Fever in Salem

In this surprising new interpretation of the New England witch trials, Ms. Carlson argues convincingly that the "bewitched" victims in fact suffered from an outbreak of encephalitis. "A unique blend of historical epidemiology and sociology....Carlson makes a good case."—Katrina L. Kelner, *Science.*

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Gnosis, following a trail blazed long before by Aby Warburg. In the modern world of Christian prophecy, similarly, pagan and Christian prophecies, exegesis and astrology burgeon on the same websites. Next to quotations from the Bible, one finds a "Nostradamus Update." This sounds a little disappointing. The author admits that "Well, the Seventh Month of 1999 came and went without any Kings of Terror descending." But he has plenty of black helicopters, rebel angels, and freemasons to give us that chiliastic frisson—not to mention the "bizarre fibrous material" that fell on a city in Idaho.

Want to combine victim feminism with ameliorism millennialism? Are you a female technophobe, not given to being analytical and trying to see the big picture? Don't worry, you can learn all you need to know about how to keep yourself and your family safe on www.y2kwomen.com, the female-friendly techno-eschatological website in Texas. The apocalyptic gloop is everywhere, not just on Fox.

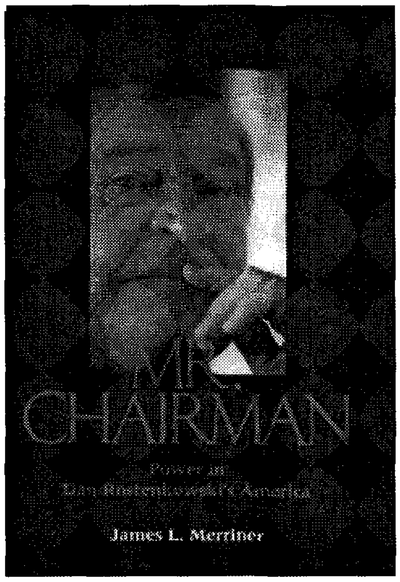
III.

But is it the same everywhere? Do these images always perform the same functions? The images that no longer resound in mainstream churches do, to be sure, decorate our movie, television, and computer screens. Kitsch media such as science fiction, horror movies, and millennial television series present millennial threats and schemata, visions of destruction wrought by everything from aliens to angels, to a vast general public. In the realm of popular culture—now as in the Reformation—night visions and apparitions, celestial harbingers of wrath and plots against humans dedicated to evil flicker before rich and poor alike, as they did in Dürer 's time.

Yet their impact is completely different. Mainstream consumers go to the movies and watch television to enjoy—from a safe cultural distance—threats of horrors to come couched in the cheerful form of noir murder mysteries about attractive FBI agents. A huge gap surely stretches between the dispensationalists who eagerly match headlines in *USA Today* to the sensational events described by LaHaye and Jenkins, and the secularists who kick back in their Barcaloungers, munching corn chips as blood is shed and plots thicken on *Millennium* or *The X-Files*. The Beast has become a mere pop star.

The educated know that the universe will eventually end, and appreciate that poisoned air and water, crazed microchips or a stray asteroid may take us out of the picture long before; but we no longer believe, deep in our being, that this will happen—or at least that it will happen soon enough to matter to us, to threaten our lives or well-being, or even to require that we change our lives. After all, as Jean Baudrillard observed almost a decade ago, "we have to get used to the idea that *there is no longer any end, there will no longer be any end* and that history itself has become interminable." No nuclear winter, no eco-terrorist cataclysm, no froth-lipped horses bearing wild riders: all these once-vivid images, the old and the new, the fantastic and the eminently feasible, have become for us only the scraps of old cultural soap and dirt. We bathe ourselves in lukewarm fear in the hope of finding emotions we know we have lost. "Our Apocalypse is not real, it is *virtual* . . . From now on, this end will revolve and continue to revolve around us untiringly."

The Apocalypse is decidedly not now, not for us, not really. It is a curiosity, a script idea, a marketing strategy, something to generate magazine theme issues with relentlessly upbeat tones and mildly ironic stories about scholarly debates. And so the millennium is at once everywhere and nowhere in our culture. Members of the educated elite, even if they practice a mainline religion, often have no exposure in childhood to the millennium, any more than they do to other unpleasant aspects of Christian tradition (which is why a descendant of Lithuanian and Russian Jews such as myself has to introduce the doctrine of double predestination to my



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Presbyterian students, who have rarely heard of it).

We may avidly follow the adventures of attractive FBI agents through noir mysteries on television, or read all about the excitement that supposedly prevailed just before the year 1000, without ever realizing that large numbers of our fellow citizens take such matters very seriously. The language of millennialism, like almost all the old language of religion, has become foreign to us—so much so that the federal agents at Waco who heard David Koresh refer to the Seven Seals thought he was talking about performing animals. The need for some sort of instruction seems great.

IT IS A challenging time for specialists in eschatology. The millennium confronts historians with both a problem and an opportunity. On the one hand, they must try to understand how, at a single moment and in a single civilization, the visions of John precipitated such sharply different kinds of mental weather in different cultural microclimates. And they have an ample heritage of excellent scholarly studies to draw on as they do so. On the other hand, they have to communicate their findings, intelligibly and attractively, to a wide readership—the educated, secular, or respectably religious readership that does not follow university scholarship or consume apocalyptic bodice-rippers, but does want to understand past and present in a deeper way. Finally, they have to explain how it is that these visions have dwindled to become the property of limited, if sizeable, groups, few of whose members hold much economic or political power.

It is a hard job—and one made more urgent, of course, by the arrival of the year 2000 itself. It is no wonder that new books about the history of the millennium are arriving in the bookstores (not the virtual bookstores, the real bookstores). *Hora novissima, tempora pessima sunt, vigilemus; ecce minaciter imminet arbiter ille supremus*. Or, as we say nowadays, the time is up, folks, the exams are due. Let us see how the class has done.

Respectably, at least. None of the new books on the millennium attacks the story with the simple, brutal tools that Cohn wielded in his pioneering effort to clear this enormous swathe of historical country. Though wildly diverse in their origins, training, and other interests, Frederick Baumgartner, Eugene Weber, David Katz, and Richard Popkin all make clear that there has never been one millennium or one way to pursue it. Visions of the future—as Weber points out in his characteristically elegant essay, quoting Bernard McGinn—are really mirrors that reflect

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the present. They offer a distorted but powerful vision of the society that brings them into being. And they vary, accordingly, as much as those societies themselves.

That, no doubt, is why our millennial visions—unlike so many past ones—swarm with plots and plotters but lack anything resembling sacred politics. Some people still see Bill Clinton as a pretty good president. But after his recent misadventures, it is hard to think of him either as the righteous ruler of the last days or as the wild prophet who seeks salvation through sin. Nor does George W. "I was clean fifteen years ago" Bush seem to fill the bill as Ronald Reagan once (and somewhat falsely) did.

Katz and Popkin show, in their lively, well-written, and ironic survey of the field, how the study of Revelation has cut across social class and intellectual interests, from the Renaissance to the present. Baumgartner's short, simply written book resembles a textbook rather than an essay, and at times degenerates into a chronicle of one failed millennium after another, hard to distinguish except by dates and places. But he too makes these points clearly in general terms. The late Arthur Mendel's work, published many years after the death of that distinguished historian of the radical tradition, suffers from his anti-modernist animus. (He seems much more concerned to show that the ideas of what he calls "the modern radical intelligentsia" led only to "maximum violence" than to draw distinctions between, say, *philosophes* who killed in the name of their ideas—and there were some—and the *philosophes*—who also existed—who believed in protecting even their enemies.) His discussion of the Enlightenment replayed Carl Becker and J.L. Talmon, and his *philosophes* spawned only Jacobin and Stalinist reigns of terror, not Jeffersonian democracy. But he enriched his work by enquiring, far more systematically than any of the others, into Jewish traditions, which he compared and contrasted, enlighteningly, to Christian ones.

No one who consults any of these surveys will believe any longer in Cohn's purist genealogy of the apocalyptic idea. In particular, Weber and Katz and Popkin show that apocalyptic readings of the future seemed sensible, and even rigorous, to some of the most learned European thinkers of the fifth, fifteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Nor will any constant reader be surprised to learn that the failure of any given millennial prediction confirms, rather than undermines, the faith of most believers.

Once again, Katz and Popkin score by their patient tracing of the twisting genealogies of doctrines, which prove the tenacity of some outlandish beliefs. They have much to say about the British Israelites—the many Englishmen, including a good number of peers, bishops, and military officers, who believed that the English were the descendants of the tribe of Ephraim (the name Britain itself, after all, clearly derives from the Hebrew *brit*, "covenant"). These beliefs, which came into being in the mid-seventeenth century, could still pull in a crowd large enough to fill the Albert Hall in the 1920s, losing their appeal only in the late 1930s. The wonderful story is wonderfully told: Monty Python meets the eschaton.

Katz and Popkin also explain some really strange bedfellowships (such as that of the extreme Christian right and some forms of Zionism). The government agents who deal with the more violent American fundamentalists could do worse than send out for any of these well-informed and happily brief maps to the roads that so long seemed to lead directly Back to the Future. Perhaps Auden was wrong when he wrote that not all the candidates pass. Certainly all of them seem to have triumphed on test Number Two, offering the public the sort of useful general instruction that historians provided in the happy centuries before we sprouted seminars, footnotes, and methodologies.

IV.

For all their authors' learning and sound common sense, however, these books also share a common problem—one that springs directly from the split described above. All of these writers, liberal or conservative, are rationalists in the very fiber of their being. Though more than one cautions, as we all do in this age when every historian would like nothing better than to be an anthropologist, against simply mocking eschatological beliefs and movements, all of them eventually succumb to this subtle but deadly temptation. As the movements multiply on their pages, as the players proliferate until no scorecard can help you remember whether you are reading about the Millerites or the Mormons, Johanna Southcott or Jim Jones, so do the disapproving adjectives and adverbs, the little hints of condescension or impatience. The rational historian, surveying this displeasing scene, still resembles Edward Gibbon more than Clifford Geertz.

A sympathetic and erudite contemporary noted that Gibbon's humanity never slept except when nuns were ravished or Christians were martyred. One might say the same of his modern successors, more than one of whom has a formidably ironic style of his own. Confronted with the wild excesses of the millenarian radicals then and now, the historian throws off the mask of empathy, to reveal the incredulous grin of a small child visiting a particularly well-stocked insect house at the zoo. Even the best of these books are sometimes reminiscent of Alex Heard's witty but superficial and terminally ironic survey of millennial cults in contemporary America, *Apocalypse Pretty Soon*.

Now, I am as skeptical, detached, committed to tolerance, and appalled by orthodoxy in action as the next man. There is a lot of nonsense in these millennial traditions, a lot of dangerous nonsense. (Nobody has yet figured out how history can end without somebody getting hurt.) But even I can see that attitudes like these hinder the historians who hold them from doing more than telling accurate stories and offering judicious comments. And so deep dimensions of apocalyptic thought, serious problems about the way it functions and the sources of its appeal, remain unexplored.

CONSIDER JUST ONE of these unexplored questions: the vexing matter of why apocalyptic beliefs have entranced critical thinkers and radical opponents of the existing order, over the centuries and the millennia, even though they almost always turned out to be wrong. (Here, a tip of the old fedora, to one of the rare exceptions: Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly, a fifteenth-century French theologian and astrologer. He predicted, as a young medievalist named Laura Smoller has shown in a fine book, that history would end in 1789. In France, of course, history means French history. And in that special, Gallic sense, d'Ailly was right—though he died centuries too soon to know that reality had confirmed his prediction.) What makes some men and women spin, and others follow, these visions of the skies opening? What makes the visions themselves so pervasively attractive?

Though our authors caution against simple explanations, all of them, in the end, resort to one: the desire for change, and hopeless discontent with the existing world. This is true enough, in some very general sense—but only in a sense so general that it encompasses Isaac Newton's discontent with his inability to understand the cosmos as a whole and Thomas Muntzer's discontent with a world order that made strangers out of human brothers. An explanation that accounts for an unhappiness that inspired the writing of biblical commentary and an unhappiness that inspired the killing of innocents who did not agree on a revolutionary program is surely too broad.

Between the ancient world and the seventeenth century—to say nothing of the industrial world, in which secular millennial schemes such as those of Fourier, Saint-Simon and Marx have covered the world like pacasandra in New Jersey—everything has changed: in society, in assumptions, in beliefs, in everyday practices. How can discontent have remained the same? How can it account for the respectable millenarianism of Church Fathers and Protestant princes? Explanations such as this resemble the ubiquitous "rise of the middle classes" that historians once relied on like a crutch, until J. H. Hexter knocked it away with a cruelly witty essay. They save us the trouble of thinking. But they do not amount to critical reflection in themselves.

THE PROTEAN NATURE of the apocalyptic was not discovered recently. A pioneering social historian named Sylvia Thrupp edited a collection of studies on *Millennial Dreams in Action* in 1962, not long after Norman Cohn hit the stands. She emphasized how normal, unrevolutionary, and firmly tied to the existing order many visions of the future turned out to be. So, almost forty years later, do many of the authors who appear in the on-line *Journal of Millennial Studies* edited by Richard Landes of Boston University. (An issue of the *Journal* traced the subtle but deadly connections that link apocalyptic movements and beliefs in America not to radicalism but to the great Beast, patriarchy.) A great many conventional print journals—such as the *American Historical Review*—have reinforced this point, or will soon do so, with issues devoted to the varieties of millennial pursuits. Yet the syntheses that have just appeared, for all their evocation of variety and their attention to context, seem to drop back into a reprise of Cohn's analysis—especially when they treat the Reformation and the last two centuries.

In these cases, I suspect, it is the culture in which we—and these historians—now live that determine their approach to the past. Cohn belonged to a generation that was horrified by the effects of radical ideologies, read apocalypses in their sinister key. But now the Berlin wall is down, and the bad news from Russia barely makes an impact, and even scare stories about the Chinese nuclear arsenal soon disappear from the front pages. Yet, curiously, we still read earlier eschatologies as Cohn did, though for very different reasons.

Members of an élite (which is how they see themselves, of course; the believers in these visions call them something else) that does not feel the terror and the beauty of the apocalypse, that knows the heavens will not open, contemporary historians see the pursuit of the millennium

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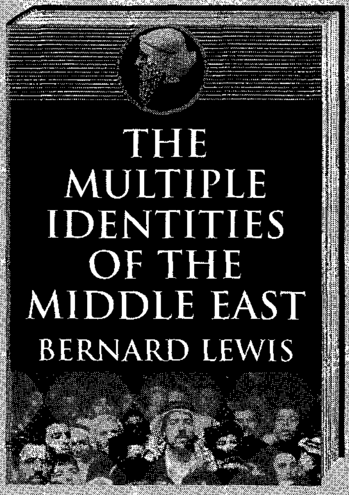
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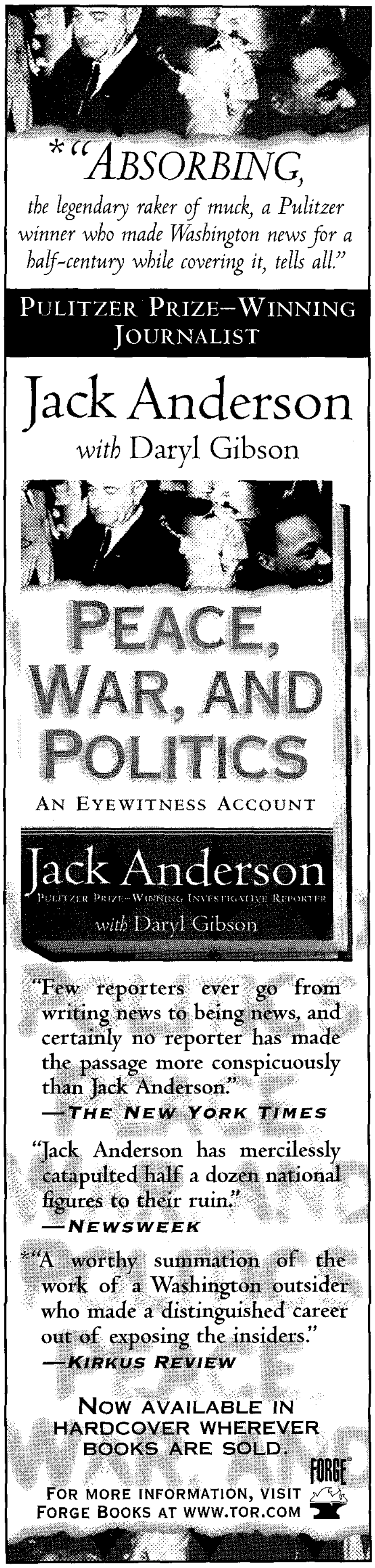

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through history as what it has now become—an obsession of the have-nots, a delusion of the flyovers. And this anachronism is as hard to shed as it is destructive of historical empathy. It leads us to ignore the internalized, moralistic, quietist forms of millennialism that dominated so much of the prophetic tradition, but make for dull copy. And it leads us to see past millennialists as culturally marginal, even though we know better.

IT TURNS OUT that a paleontologist is more helpful than any of the professional historians on the roots of millennial belief. The essay in which Steven Jay Gould sets about *Questioning the Millennium* is not one of his major works, as he himself confesses. And his main point is not profound. But it certainly is clarifying. Gould wants to show that the millennium's end—like those of centuries, and the return of Halley's comet, and other dates to which prophets and historians have traditionally ascribed deep meaning—is purely arbitrary.

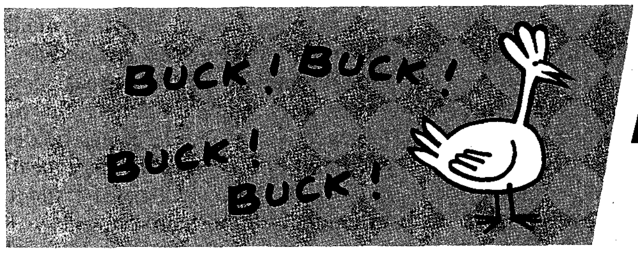
A long tradition of calendrical computation, which deals with the incommensurable revolutions of the moon and sun—has established the year 2000 as a marker of some sort. And even a brief historical survey shows that this is a wholly arbitrary marker. It does not stand at a neat interval of years from, say, the date given in the Hebrew Bible for the Creation of the World. (The next Jewish millennium, or the year 6000, will arrive in the Christian year 2240.) It does not even mark the real beginning of the next millennium. Indeed, as Gould elegantly shows, even the decision whether to make 2000 or 2001 the first year of the next millennium will be made, as was the decision about when the twentieth century started, not by public officials or scientists or scholars, but by the editors and the media barons who determine the rules of everyday language in the modern world.

Gould's essay directs a good deal of facile mockery at those who set special store by the three zeros that will soon roll up on the cosmic odometer—and fail to realize that in doing so, they are merely admiring an updated form of a medieval monk's effort, doomed like all others to only partial success, to create a neat cyclical calendar. "As a man of below average stature myself, I am delighted to report that the source of our infernal troubles about the end of centuries may be traced to a sixth century monk named Dionysius Exiguus, or (literally) Dionysius the Short." Gould's book has a shallow Enlightenment aspect in its consideration of these irrationalities; and yet Gould has the sense to prospect where the historians do not quite dare to go. Naturally, he knows that chronological schemes have possessed an extraordinary appeal—that millennial exegetes, astrologers, and many others have dedicated themselves with passion to the task of finding time's underlying order. And he sees this larger context—the whole world of speculation about the order and meaning of time—as a besetting preoccupation of most civilizations. Millennialism, he argues, is only one very dramatic version of the search for time's hidden patterns, one form of a larger enterprise.

GOULD DRAWS ON a curious and massively erudite book by Nicholas Campion, *The Great Year*, which appeared in 1994 and which synthesized a vast amount of material about historical schemes. Campion moved rapidly from Mesopotamia to Margaret Thatcher, sometimes with uncritical rashness, but often with a boldness and a comparative zeal that put professional historians to shame. He tried to show that all chronological schemes that seek to find the future in the order of the past are organically related, descended from a single Mesopotamian form of political astrology that left rich traces in myth, ritual, and speculation. While he failed to prove this larger point, he did show just how many thinkers and how many cultures have believed that they could read time itself, inferring the future from the past and even using their predictive abilities to participate actively in the creation of the future that they saw coming.

Stimulated by Campion, Gould thinks as he writes. He even adds a footnote, in proof, to admit that his own account of the ways that western apocalyptic beliefs stirred non-western peoples (such as the late nineteenth-century Sioux followers of the Ghost Dance) to organize movements that proved disastrous sounds "parochial and condescending" in the light of the mass suicide of the Heaven's Gate cult. (He could also have mentioned the Tai-ping movement, the Christian roots of which Jonathan Spence recently analyzed in an extremely erudite book.) Gould doesn't free himself from all the historians' schemes—he still correlates apocalyptic beliefs with deprivation, though much evidence does not fit this argument. But he also suggests another way of looking at the pursuit of the millennium.

Humans, he points out, seem to have a propensity—one that appears in cultures and societies so disparate from one another, in time and in space, that it might even be natural—to look for an order in time. Time—or so humans wanted to believe for millennia, and many still do—is not a merely natural phenomenon. It embodies a deeper order.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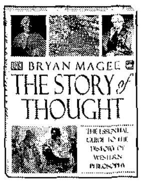
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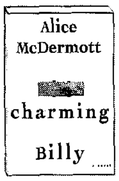
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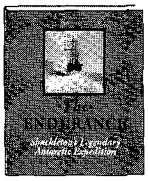
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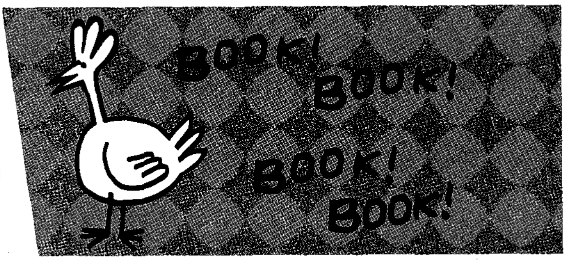
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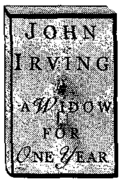
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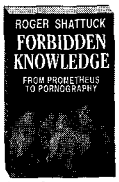
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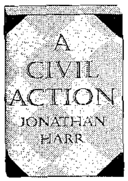
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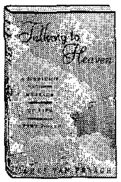
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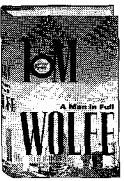
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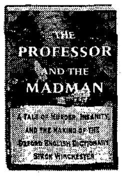
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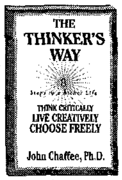
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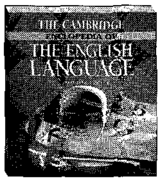
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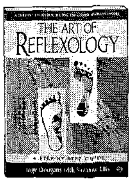
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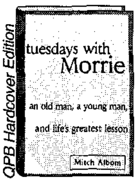
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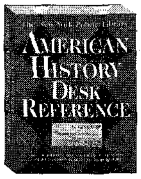
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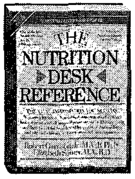
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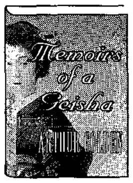
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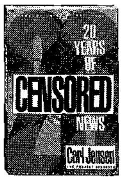
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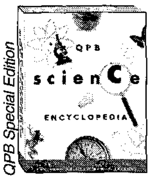
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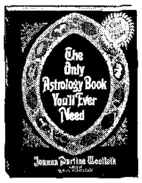
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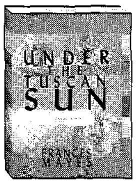
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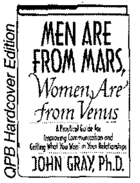
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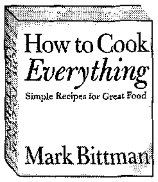
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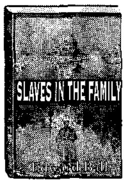
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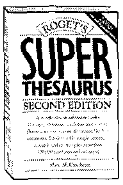
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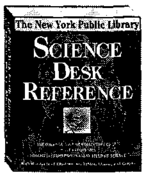
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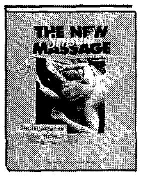
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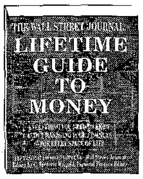
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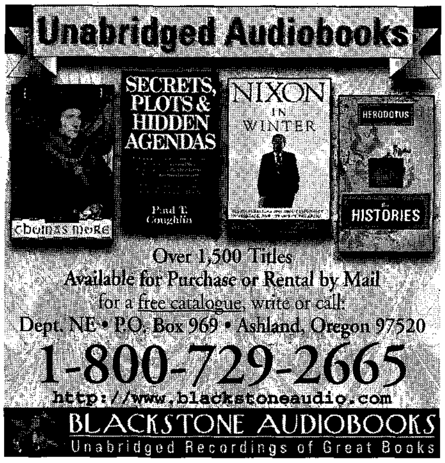
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It has a direction—forwards or cyclical (or, more often, both at once). It is coded. And there is a key, which can take almost any form.

Astrologers identify the key as the Great Conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn which take place every twenty years: these explain the rise of world religions, the birth of the Savior and the death of Warren Harding. Exegetes find the key in Scripture. They hold that history should have a structural resemblance to the first week of the world's existence. Creation took God six days, and so history should have six main divisions, each a thousand years long. Still others look outside Revelation for their scripts. And still others—in societies that range from ancient Israel and Rome to the Mayas of Yucatan—see individual days as marked, either by some celestially induced quality or by events that took place on them long ago, as good or bad.

The pursuit of the millennium—traditional or modern, short sides and back or long-haired and Aquarian—is, Gould suggests, only one element of this larger search for time's order and direction. This search has occupied the gravest of thinkers, from Abraham ibn Ezra in the twelfth century, who (like many other medieval believers in astrology) correlated the rise of new religions with the great conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn, to Newton in the seventeenth century. It has yielded, in prose and poetry, spectacular evocations of the order of time and history. And it has stimulated prophets and radicals.

It is by understanding the roots and the variations of this phenomenon—a psychological phenomenon rather than a sociological one—that we may come to understand its millenarial subset. We may then realize that we have met the enemy, and he is us. The moderns, the rationalist elite, the secularist historians, who do not believe that time has a single coherent order and meaning, find millennialism hard to grasp. This is true not because we have attained a state of enlightenment that our forefathers failed to attain. It is true because we have lost a sense of time's wonder and terror that all of them—premillennialists and postmillennialists, ameliorists and revolutionaries—possessed.

Pity the historian who lives in an age without qualities. Of what will his dreams consist? ■

Camus and twentieth-century clarity.

The Sickness Unto Life

By JAMES WOOD

I.

THE TRADITION OF atheism and agnosticism has been somewhat shallow, philosophically speaking. It has had a tendency to harden into hobnailed anti-clericalism, or to soften into rationalist serenity. There is a veering between a rather charming optimism and a rather petty naughtiness. One thinks of the calm ironies of Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary*, in which the heaven of the ancients is likened to no more than "the little fluff" that surrounds the cocoon of the silkworm, or of Hume mocking the idea that heaven could be large enough to contain millions of souls. For many unbelievers, it seems self-evident that religion is not our salvation, and thus hardly worth the argument. For Stendhal, to judge from his fiction, the priests are all hypocrites, and therefore religion is all hypocrisy and nonsense.

The deepest struggle with Christianity may well be bloodily intramural. Thus the fiercest objectors to Christianity are often themselves believers; their belief is doubt-intoxicated, while by contrast the atheists are merely drunk on certainty. Perhaps the most formidably skeptical book in the history of theology, Pierre Bayle's *Historical and Skeptical Dictionary*, appears to have been written by a Christian. It logically devastates one orthodox position after another, only to return, at the end of each entry, to its own thinly orthodox position—that Christianity is not rational, that if we were rationalists we could not possibly believe in it, and that therefore we cannot be rationalists and should simply cleave all the more strongly to our thoroughly irrational faith. One understands why there has been argument since the publication of this book in the seventeenth century over the ratio of Bayle's blasphemy to belief.

Bayle, who influenced Melville's religious torments, is hardly alone. Kierkegaard often seems to oppose the prison of Christianity with all his loathing, before masochistically deciding that one can live only within that same prison. "One must be quite literally a lunatic to become a Christian," he writes in his *Journal.* In *Works of Love*, he argues that the Christian preacher should preach "against Christianity." And that troubled believer, Dostoevsky, in the "Grand Inquisitor" section of *The Brothers Karamazov,* delivers a hammer-blow to the cathedral-door of orthodox faith.

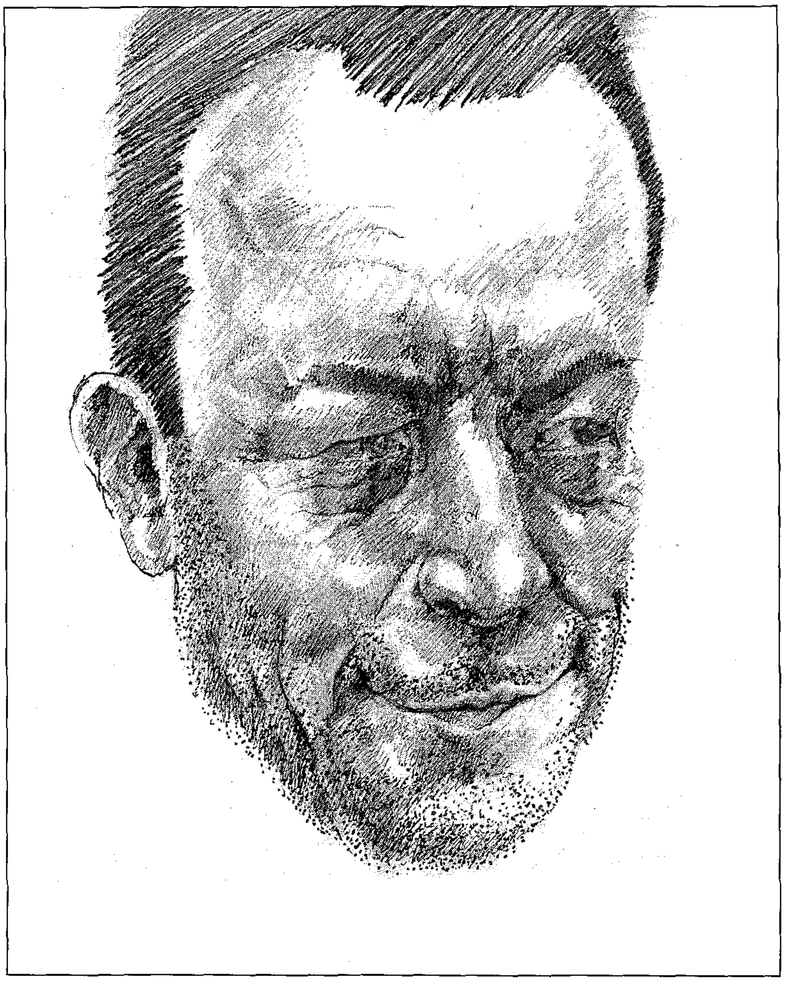
To all this, Camus, is a fierce exception. Although he was not of course a Christian, it is within this tradition of unstable belief that his thinking breathes its unbelief. It is in this respect that *The Myth of Sisyphus* constitutes an exception to the discourse of atheism and agnosticism. For Camus does not proceed as if theology can simply be killed off by philosophy or by philosophical arguments. He proceeds as if religion is best countered by a rival form of belief, the belief that one cannot, must not believe in God.

Sartre and others dismissed Camus's essay for its muddled philosophy. But *The Myth of Sisyphus* is not a treatise, it is a tract, a tract aimed at evacuating God, and a promise to live by the rigor of that evacuation. It is an oration, a personal statement written by a young man living in narrow exile in Paris during the bleakest early days of the Second World War. This young man offers a necessarily vulnerable summation of the little that he has so far learned: "I don't know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know this meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it."

Faced with this vulnerability, we should not mark Camus as if he were sitting a metaphysical exam, but judge his essay as a work of art. That is to say, we should judge it by the dignity of its argumentation, not by the rigor of its proofs; by the beauty of its effort, not by the conclusiveness of its attainment. In this light, it is indeed a moving and impressive work, still able to stir those readers willing to waver.

II.

CAMUS CANNOT KNOW that God does not exist; he is determined to *believe* that God cannot exist. Camus opposes religious faith not with rationalism but with a negative faith of his own, a faith in negation. Often he seems to invert the processes of the religious beliefs that he criticizes. In particular, his work can seem to be a reply to Dostoevsky and to Kierkegaard, and to the battered paradox whereby those two writers acknowledge the absurdity of the universe only to embrace more strongly the scandal of belief in God. While Kierkegaard insists, in *The Sickness Unto Death*, that Christianity "begins" with the concept of sin, Camus insists again and again that we are innocent. While Kierkegaard argues that paganism is no more than being in a state of despair but being ignorant of it, Camus delights in paganism, and in a paganism that is not ignorant of itself but self-aware and relentlessly vigilant. While Dostoevsky proposes suicide as the only logical response to an awareness that God does not exist, Camus proposes that the person without God must not kill himself, but realize instead that he is condemned to death, and live his life saturated with that terrible knowledge. Camus proposes, in place of faith, awareness itself.


Albert Camus by David Schorr for The New Republic

As both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky seek a world with meaning, so Camus, because of his sense that the world is "unreasonable," is thirsty for meaning. He has none of the rationalist's calm at the idea of an entirely rational universe, and none of the agnostic's serenity that it does not matter that the universe is meaningless. It matters very much to Camus, and it is the contradiction between what he calls "the human need [for meaning] and the unreasonable silence of the world" that drives him towards the position that he calls "the absurd."

He writes that *Moby-Dick* is a truly "absurd" novel, and like Melville he appears at times not quite able to relinquish the idea that God does not exist. At such moments, it is not so much God's absence that seems to provoke him, but God's silence. In his hunger for religious meaning, Camus sometimes resembles the Melville who complained in *Pierre* that "Silence is the only Voice of our God . . . how can a man get a Voice out of Silence?" And like both Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard, whom Camus criticizes for their "leap" into irrational faith, Camus is forced into his own kind of leap, which is the assertion—and it is not much more than this—that we must oppose the world's meaninglessness with our revolt, our freedom, and our passion.

Camus's own leap begins in his apprehension that the world lacks providential meaning, and that therefore human beings must be meaning's providers. This is our "absurd" task. Camus feels the meaninglessness of life because he cannot believe in God, or in transcendent design, and because he sees clearly that everything he does is menaced by death. *The Myth of Sisyphus* is an extraordinarily death-visited book. Indeed, throughout Camus's work, and above all in *The Stranger* and *The Plague*, the very image of the human is the man condemned to death.

Pissarro at Dusk

I

I suppose I should have told you about Louveciennes
and the other villages where he took a house

with his brood of seven, shown where this street ends
and that lane forks, those walks of a Pontoise

I have never seen except as his accompanying
shadow on leaf glued autumn pavements, or

crunching bright piebald snow, but I kept seeing
things through his eyes: a gate, a rusted door,

since all our radiant bush, a road, a hill
with torches of pouis, a shade-stayed stream

made joy recede to memory, our provincial
palms, bowing, withdraw before his dream,

as History's distance shrank a crescent fringe
of rustling yellow fronds on a white shore,

a house, a harbour with its mountain range
to a dot named by its cartographer

the name longer than the dot. In Trinidad,
there was one painter, the Frenchman Cazabon

whose embalmed *paysages* were all we had,
our mongrel culture gnawing its one bone.

Cazabon and Pissarro; the first is ours,
the second found the prism that was Paris,

rooted in France, his dark-soiled ancestors;
no matter, cherish the conviction their work carries.

II

Affliction: inflammation of the eyes
that often stops him painting. The tears run,

but older than tears is the paralysis
of doubt, unchanged from when he first began,

since man is a small island who contains
cisterns of sorrow, and drought that absence dries,

and doubt; St. Thomas hazing as it rains
and love, the mist-bow bent on paradise.

In his life's dusk, though hand and eye grow weary,
his concentration strengthens in its skill

some critics think his work is ordinary,
but the ordinary is the miracle.

Ordinary love and ordinary death,
ordinary suffering, ordinary birth,

the ordinary couplets of our breath,
ordinary heaven, ordinary earth.

To watch the moving sea, heavy and silver
on a mid-August afternoon, then turn

his catalogue of views of the great river
dragging its barges, so little time to learn,

you are taken there, though, by his brush's
delicate frenzy, by all his tenderness

even for winter scenes when the snow hushes
the rasping surface and a boulevard's noise.

My Paris comes out of his canvases
not from a map, and perhaps, even better

than Paris itself; they fill these verses
with their own light, their walks, their weather

that will outlast me as they outlast him,
their hustling crowds, their carriages in strokes

fresh, fast and trembling, as in a film
where wheels stop and run backwards, silver spokes

of drizzle down this boulevard, that park
where I can gaze at leisure, taking time

to loiter at each stroke, at the faint arc
of a white bridge; so modest, so sublime!

III

Paint a true street in Anse La Raye, Choiseul,
the roasting asphalt, the bleached galvanise roofs

grooved like these lines, paint the dark heat as well
inside the canted shacks, do the blurred hooves

of a boy whooping a white mare near a lagoon
for gone Gauguin, paint the violet bruise

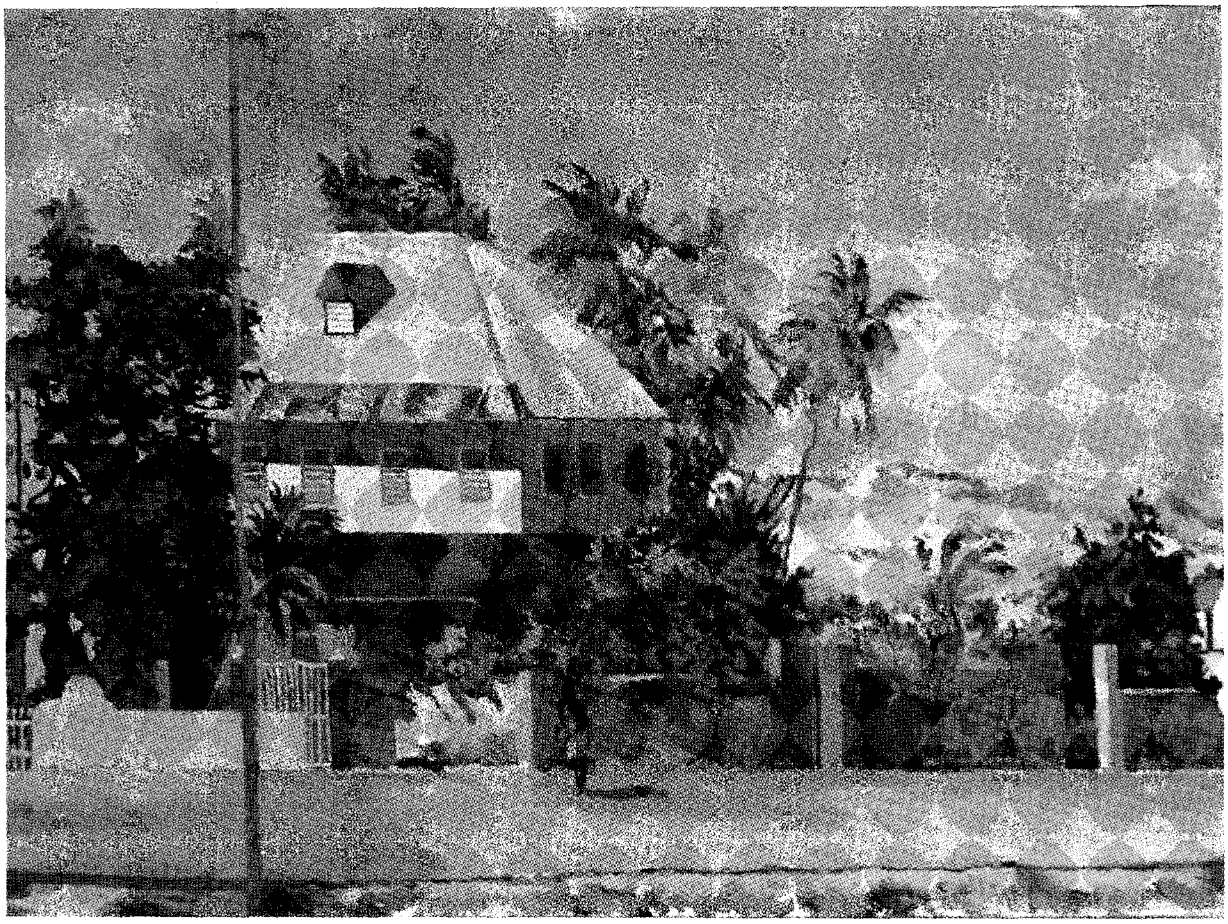
of reef under water wiry at noon
paint the Cathedral's solace, the canoes

resting in the almonds, always the same
canoes resting under the almonds, and next you could

paint the thick flowers too poor to have a name,
that couple entering a shading wood

for something no longer your business,
mix the light's colour with that pliant knife

that is your plasterer's trowel. It would be nice
to do this in deep gratitude for your life,



Derek Walcott, "Street in Gros Islet"

just as its hallelujahs praise their giver
the chalk white chapel portals of La Fargue

before L'aouvière Doreé the sun-gilt river
whose missal shallows recite your epilogue.

IV

Our tribes were shaken like seeds from a sieve.
Our dialects, rooted, forced their own utterance,

and what were we without the slow belief
in our own nature? Not Guinea, not Provence.

And yet so many fled, so many lost
to the magnetic spires of cities, not the cedars,

as if a black pup turned into the ghost
of the white hound, but a search that will lead us

where we began; to islands, not the busy
but unchanged patronage of the empire's centre,

guests at the roaring feast of Veronese,
or Tiepolo's Moors, where once we could not enter.

Camille Pissarro must have heard the noise
of loss-lamenting slaves, and if he did,

they tremble in the poplars of Pontoise,
the trembling, elegiac tongues he painted.

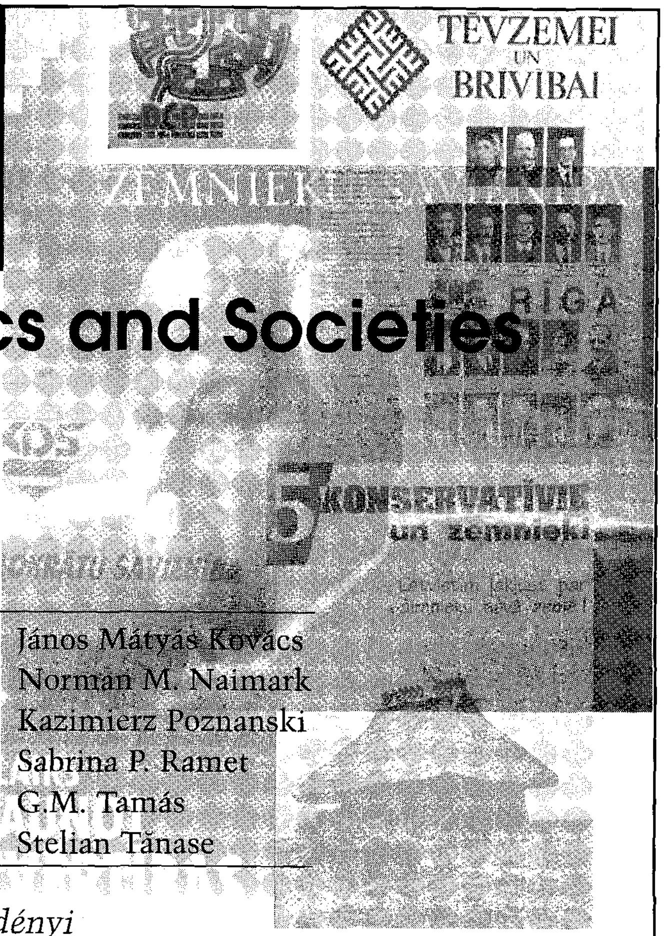
Swivel the easel down, drill it in sand,
then tighten the canvas against vaps of wind,

straddle the stool, reach for the brush with one hand
then pour the oil in trembling sacrament.

There is another book that is the shadow
of my hand on this sunlit page, the one

I have tried hard to write, but let this do;
let gratitude redeem what lies undone.

Derek Walcott



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EPOANR

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the "absurd man" is the man walking toward the hangman's noose who sees, in a burst of freedom just as he mounts the scaffold, a shoelace or some such triviality of life from the corner of his eye. It is understood throughout the book that death at every moment makes life a broken circuit. Reading Camus, we feel that death stands at the end of our lives as an enormous negation, the assassin of memory, a kind of official torturer telling the poor citizen: "You saw nothing, you did not experience the things you thought you experienced. You did not live. You are erased."

LITTLE MORE STRONGLY marks Camus's apparently anti-religious thought as secretly religious than his sense that death poses a metaphysical problem for life. For many rationalists or atheists, the fact that we die is not such a large problem: death is merely a dark continuation of the general meaninglessness—it is merely, as it were, the even smaller print to the already small print of life. Death only becomes a problem for those religious believers who see life as something more than material existence, which is why Christians must announce that death has been conquered by Christ.

Inverting this, Camus tells us that death conquers us. He believes death is a problem because he works within the essentially religious apprehension that life, if it is to have have meaning, must in some way be extended. The religionist has a solution to this, of course, and locates that extension in heaven, in eternal life. Camus's secular solution lies in an extension of life *in life itself*, a kind of aeration of life. Camus eventually finds the figure of this extension, for better or worse, in the idea of repetition, and especially in Sisyphus's repeated task of rolling his rock up the hill. But this is really a figurative or metaphorical extension, something a little like the idea of repeated curtain calls, or of adding extra songs to a concert; and indeed, Camus announces that the absurd person must concentrate on a greater quantity of experiences, not on a greater quality: more life, not purer life. Camus cannot evade death; instead he will (in both senses of the word) entertain death, and keep it busy.

Aware that life is futile, Camus feels himself a stranger to it. He wrote *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Stranger* almost simultaneously, in the late 1930s and in the first few months of 1940, finishing the essay in Paris, far from his native Algeria. Exile and estrangement, though used a little loosely by Camus, are imbued with metaphysical resonance. Camus describes himself as awakened to the absurdity of life, for "in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity."

The biographical hint—the young Frenchman from Algeria condemned to an uneasy life in Paris—is there, of course, in this language of exile. Yet Camus rings meaning from these words so that they become a metaphorical fluid in which his enquiry can swim. The stranger or the exile is absurd, painfully awake to the impossibility of reconciling himself to his situation. He cannot return to the homeland, to the Eden of consolation. Camus finds fault with the Christianity of Kierkegaard and the existentialism of Jaspers because, in ultimately deciding to find rational "a world [they] originally imagined as devoid of any guiding principle," they fall prey to "the spirit of nostalgia." Husserl, too, proposes an abstract "leap" that Camus refuses, because it means "forgetting just what I do not want to forget": the unreasonableness of the world.

So Camus refuses nostalgia, though he admits to living under its shadow: "It is that divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints, my nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the contradiction that binds them together." He admits freely enough to "my appetite for the absolute and for unity." The "contradiction" between that appetite and its disappointment constitutes the absurd. The absurd person, then, cannot leap into any kind of faith or belief, because this is a leap into forgetting; but Sisypheanism is a most vigilant remembering of exile, a permanent remembering.

Sisypheanism is refusing to forget where one is from (Eden), where one toils (exile), and where one is headed (death). The pain of the absurdity, as Camus seems to suggest, is that one can admit to the spirit of nostalgia but one cannot enact it. Camus can dream of his lost country, but he cannot return to it. In other words, he is not a nostalgic so much as an elegist; in a sense, *The Myth of Sisyphus* is an elegy for belief.

III.

SEEN IN ANOTHER light, Camus's work is also an essay on metaphysical comedy. *The Myth of Sisyphus* proposes to substitute a tragedy of repetition for the ordinary, unwitting comedy of repetition. The absurd person is someone who has seen through the ridiculous repetitions of daily life, the gray routine and the stifling calendar of existence: "Rising, tram, four hours in the office or factory, meal, tram, four hours of work, meal, sleep and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, according to the same rhythm—this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the 'why' arises [*le 'pourquoi' s'élève*] and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement." Suddenly, the absurd person sees through this routine, and "the chain of daily gestures is broken." Now everything begins to seem pointless and comical: "At certain moments of lucidity, the mechanical aspect of their gestures, their meaningless pantomime make silly everything that surrounds them. A man is talking on the telephone behind a glass partition; you cannot hear him but you see his incomprehensible dumb-show: you wonder why he is alive."

HENRI BERGSON, IN his essay on comedy, offers one definition of the comic as watching a room full of dancers but with one's own ears stopped so that one cannot hear the music. Bergson also finds a strand of comedy in the idea of the human turned into a machine, and in the idea of repetition, of repeated meaningless actions. Both Bergson and Camus, then, find in modern industrial society an emblem of the comic. Camus, of course, is concerned not merely to laugh, but to find some kind of solution, outside the religious, to this comic-uncomic "chain of daily gestures." One cannot escape this comedy, but one can at least metaphysicalize it, and see it in its largest universal dimension, and then resist it, fight it with Pyrrhic integrity.

The first step is to turn the comic into the absurd, to convert futile daily repetition into eternal Sisyphean repetition. The comic becomes the absurd precisely when we are made to see its comedy: the absurd is, in part, the awareness that life is a comic dumbshow. Then the absurd person must begin the long, always repeated struggle against the terms of that dumbshow. This is a fight that is never over, that lasts exactly the duration of a life, that *is* indeed a life—which is why the absurd person cannot commit suicide. And because it is a chain of repetitions, the absurd life may be hardly discernible as different from ordinarily comic daily routine. Formally, it may not look very different. Presumably, the absurd person may go to work, and stand in the subway with everyone else. Internally, of course, the absurd life is entirely different, because the absurd person knows the difference between ignorant routine and rebellious repetition.

It is this moment at which the comedy of repetition turns into something like tragic repetition, what Rieux in *The Plague* calls "a never-ending defeat." The absurd person is fighting the terms of existence, the sentence handed down by nonexistent gods: "If I see a man armed only with a sword attack a group of machine-guns, I shall consider his act to be absurd." (One sees why Camus considered *Moby-Dick* an absurd novel.) The absurd spirit might be said to be tragic stoicism: "Everything considered, a determined soul will always manage." This struggle "implies a total absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair), a continual rejection (which must not be confused with renunciation), and a continuous dissatisfaction (which must not be compared to immature unrest) . . . The absurd has meaning only in so far as it is not agreed to." And so Camus rises to his stubborn declaration: "I do not want to found anything on the incomprehensible. I want to know whether I can live with what I know and with that alone." He continues: "the absurd is sin without God. It is a matter of living in that state of the absurd."

Why is the absurd "sin without God"? Again, we see how Camus inverts all religious categories, in the process converting them out of their baleful literalism and into the metaphorical. The absurd is like living sinfully because Camus means that, like sin, we cannot escape it: it is a kind of original sin but without the origin, which would be God. It is the sentence passed on us by life. (Here one feels the inevitable shadow of Augustine, the great proponent of original sin, on whom Camus wrote a thesis. And, indeed, throughout his life, Camus may have been "answering" Augustine more systematically than perhaps he knew. For in place of Augustine's asceticism, Camus proposed pagan sunlight, in place of Augustine's sex-recoil, Camus proposed—and enacted—the role of the seducer.) For if it were passed by God it would become a religious problem. Yet Camus is not like one of those rationalists who believes that once God is removed from the picture, metaphysical problems disappear. Quite the contrary. Camus believes that once God is removed, our religious problems end, but our metaphysical problems begin.

They begin with death. Yet Camus's answer to death is more active than the notion of stoicism perhaps suggests. There is no resignation involved; always an endless signing-on to new tasks. Obviously, says Camus, the absurd person cannot commit suicide. For suicide, "like the leap [of religious faith], is acceptance at its extreme. Everything is over and man returns to his essential history." To kill oneself is to allow both life and death to have had dominion over one. Determining to live in the absurd, on the other hand, is "simultaneously awareness and rejection of death."

So the absurd man begins the battle. What does he do? Here, Camus's argument is somewhat vulnerable. For it is here, if his proposals are to be usable, that Camus must reconvert his struggling metaphors—and what is Sispypheanism but a furious metaphor?— into the literalism of actual struggles, as actual people might live them. It is merely metaphorical (or rhetorical) to speak of fighting the terms of the absurd with "my revolt, my freedom and my passion." But Camus—and it is part of his appeal as a writer—wants to be more local than this, more practical than the merely metaphorical. He would like to suggest a number of possible absurd roles or lives.

He proposes "the seducer," "the actor," "the conqueror" (who is always engaged in "a campaign in which he is defeated in advance"), and "the writer." These, says Camus, are examples of people who live many roles, and who, in living so much, flourish a pagan provisionality in the face of the narrow absurd. In other words, these people are rebelliously alive, and in being so, they defy the absurd. For the absurd man must substitute "the quantity of experiences for the quality . . . What counts is not the best living but the most living."

The suspicion is stirred in the reader that although Camus is writing as if he has forsaken the figurative and rhetorical for the literal and usable, he is merely applying the figurative and the rhetorical to actual lives. Indeed, what he seems to like *about the roles he has chosen is that they* involve acting, they involve an inhabiting of the metaphorical, a dressing-up in likenesses of various kinds. And one notices that as soon as Camus describes the strategies of these lives of rebellion, he merely repeats the large exhortations of the earlier theoretical passages. The seducer, the conqueror, the actor and the writer are symbolic figures, on which to hang symbolic possibilities of revolt. (They also seem, as models, painfully limited by their epoch: decidedly French masculine ideals in a time of war.)

THOUGH CAMUS WOULD not admit it, he can counter the terms of the absurd only with a leap of his own, a leap into negative faith. "Being aware of one's life, one's revolt, one's freedom, and to the maximum, is living, *and to the maximum.*" Camus's leap may perhaps not at first resemble one, and this is partly because he so widens the terms of what constitutes "revolt" that his leap may involve nothing more than simply remaining alive, simply refraining from

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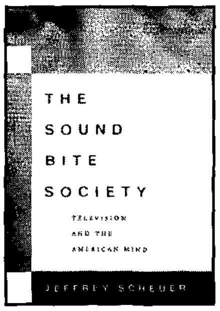

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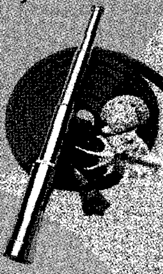

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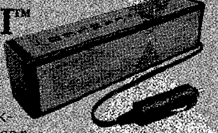

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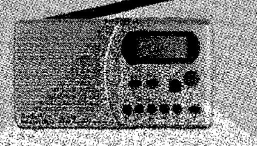

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killing oneself. Where Kierkegaard demands a fierce and fateful choosing of God, where Dostoevsky demands a grotesque paradoxical decision to see the horror of the world and then to use it as what Camus scornfully calls a "*tremplin d'éternité*," a springboard to eternity, Camus tells us, in effect, that we cannot avoid the leap unless we kill ourselves. Camus does not quite say anything as simple as "We can only choose life," but that is the brunt of his assertion.

And in the end, this, too, is only a religious assertion, a determination, a faith. Camus proves nothing. Nor is he necessarily right, even within the terms of atheism. Perhaps Camus is right that to kill oneself would be to allow death to have dominion, and that to live rebelliously is to both be aware of and to reject death. But these are the essentially religious terms—or the shadows of religious terms—that Camus has himself inherited and adapted. One can imagine another atheistic argument for rebellion that also advocated suicide: Kirilov, in *The Possessed,* believes that only when we all have the courage to kill ourselves, will we be free. Or one can imagine another argument that did not involve rebellion but a certain kind of resignation: the Czech novelist Karel Capek liked to say that "a short life is better for mankind, for a long life would deprive man of his optimism." In other words, in place of Camus's mixture of tragic stoicism and pagan revolt, there might exist a more simply tragic vision (as in Sophocles and *King Lear*), or a more blandly stoical acceptance (as in Epicurus and Lucretius).

THE DIFFICULTY OF Camus's proposal for rebellion is that at times he seems merely to be describing life itself, which is tautological. And if he is only describing life itself, he is also describing it metaphorically, at a remove—as an endless campaign of defeats, a choosing between roles, a vigilance, living like the condemned man and so on. These images are powerfully worked in his fiction, and perhaps fiction is where they most happily breathe: one remembers the image of Grand in *The Plague*, writing again and again the first sentence of his novel. But *The Myth of Sisyphus* is not a novel, and there is a danger that when Camus comes to tell us how we can live with the absurd, he can do no more than tell us to do what we already do (which is live)—but tell us to live figuratively, to live *as if.*

Nothing is more obviously an example of this figurative tendency than his choice of Sisyphus as the ultimately absurd man. Sisyphus is condemned to roll his rock up a hill, so that it can roll back down. Then Sisyphus's task begins again. Here is the emblem of the absurd, says Camus, of our repeated struggle against the obscure terms of our existence. But, adds Camus, there may be a moment when Sisyphus is walking back down the hill when he is briefly free, when he is "superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock." Sisyphus, then, is both prisoner and rebel.

This is moving, and Camus writes with great delicacy at the end of his essay. But it is movingly useless. What moves us, in part, is the spectacle of Camus's belief; what moves us is that Camus's emblem of the absurd is so hopelessly metaphorical, but that Camus believes in him so fiercely, and so sympathetically describes his fate and his revolt, that Sisyphus appears to be real to Camus, and becomes *almost* actual for us. This is the quality of Camus's thought, and it is why he is such a powerful novelist: he takes religious terms, turns them into secular metaphor, and then, by dint of his sympathetic concentration on them, appears to reconvert them back into an unmetaphorical, usable reality. What he does, in fact, is act as if they were real while using them metaphorically. We are reminded that his essay is not philosophy at all, but a kind of storytelling.

SISYPHUS IS NOT only a metaphorical answer to the terms of the absurd, but also a religious one. Camus had perhaps read Kierkegaard's essay *Repetition*, in which Kierkegaard describes the various ways in which the pleasure we take in life is menaced by repetition. We fall in love, for instance, but then repetition takes over, and kills the originality and novelty of our experience. Characteristically, Kierkegaard concludes, somewhat arbitrarily, by asserting that the only way to outwit ordinary repetition is by making it religious, and by seeing repetition as the truly religious way of life. Repetition, writes Kierkegaard, is "a religious movement by virtue of the absurd." The final repetition, of course, is eternity itself, in which heavenly existence repeats itself endlessly. Kierkegaard's proposal is the absolute opposite of Camus's.

Camus makes no mention of Kierkegaard's essay, but he was of course familiar with the notion of eternity as a kind of repetition-without-repetition. The Christian wants religiously to extend life, and finds this extension, as I mentioned earlier, in heaven, in its repetition without end. Camus wants to extend life on earth, and can do this really only by inflating a metaphor, an emblem. This is not necessarily a weak inversion if, as the atheist thinks, the Christian heaven has only ever been a metaphorical emblem anyway. Seen in this light, Camus offers his secular metaphorical extension for the Christian metaphorical extension, his secular repetition for Kierkegaard's eternal repetition. He offers Sisyphus's hell for the believer's heaven. Earlier in his essay he writes that "the present and the succession of presents before a constantly conscious soul is the ideal of the absurd man." This is Camus's eternity: an endless repetition of presents. And since, unlike the literalist Christian vision, we die and are cancelled—since heaven does not exist—Camus can make this repetition endless (or eternal) *only* with the help of the flexibility of artistic metaphor. For life is short, but art is long, especially the art of metaphor.

SO IS CAMUS'S rebellion only metaphorical and not actual? Perhaps not. His own conduct in the war suggests otherwise. And four years after Camus finished his essay, Primo Levi faced an intolerable temptation in a concentration camp. It was a temptation to pray, and Levi, vigilant and lucid as perhaps Camus could not have imagined or feared, resisted the temptation. He gives an account of the episode in *The Drowned and the Saved.* Instinct with Camus's language of lucidity and absurdity, it is an extraordinarily "rebellious" passage of secular writing:

> I too entered the Lager as a non-believer, and as a non-believer I was liberated and have lived to this day; actually, the experience of the Lager with its frightful iniquity has confirmed me in my laity. It has prevented me, and still prevents me, from conceiving of any form of providence or transcendent justice . . . I must nevertheless admit that I experienced (and again only once) the temptation to yield, to seek refuge in prayer. This happened in the October of 1944, in the one moment in which I lucidly perceived the imminence of death. Naked and compressed among my naked companions with my index card in hand, I was waiting to file past the "commission" that with one glance would decide whether I should immediately go into the gas chamber or was instead strong enough to go on working. For one instant I felt the need to ask for help and asylum; then, despite my anguish, equanimity prevailed: you do not change the rules of the game at the end of the match, nor when you are losing. A prayer under these conditions would have been not only absurd (what rights could I claim? and from whom?) but blasphemous, obscene, laden with the greatest impiety of which a non-believer is capable. I rejected the temptation: I knew that otherwise were I to survive, I would have to be ashamed of it. ■

BLUE HEART

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Opening November 3

The Studio Theatre
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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Assets

“SPIT AT IT,” I TOLD MY mother. She was taken aback by the intemperateness of my advice, but she concurred in my analysis. I was referring to an application that she received last year from the Swiss Fund for Needy Victims of the Holocaust/Shoa. It asked that she sign on the line beneath two statements—“I declare that I am a Holocaust survivor in need” and “I further declare that I am Jewish and lived in a country at the time that it was under the Nazi regime, under Nazi occupation or under the regime of Nazi collaborators and that I am a citizen, permanent resident or other legal resident of the United States”—and thereby make herself eligible to receive “a humanitarian support.” What had startled her was the magnitude of the support with which the Swiss were proposing to “honor” her suffering. The accompanying letter described it as “not only a gesture, but also a meaningful assistance,” and concluded that survivors who are not “in need” should not apply, for “if other survivors apply, no more than 300 Dollars could be paid out to each eligible applicant. May God forbid that anything like the Shoa repeats.” Three hundred dollars! It is not a lot to pay for a clean conscience, especially at Swiss prices; but my mother was not prepared to auction the absolution sought at any price. This was not charity, this was contempt.

LAST WEEK I WAS REMINDED OF MY mother’s moral poise by a photograph that appeared on the front page of *The New York Times*. It showed two anonymous hands rummaging through a crate of wedding bands. The men and the women who had worn these sanctifying rings were Hungarian Jews who had been slaughtered by the Nazis. According to a report by the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States, it appears that this Nazi plunder was itself plundered by American soldiers, who intercepted a Nazi gold train in May 1945. “We want to establish the principle that the United States is willing to hold itself to the same high standard to which it has held others,” the admirable Stuart Eizenstat diplomatically remarked, though in the matter of ethical behavior in Europe in the 1940s there is almost not a European country that can cast a stone at the United States, the avarice of a certain General Harry J. Collins notwithstanding. I pondered the image of those wedding bands and all I saw was the emptiness that they described, thousands and thousands of little circles of death and little circumferences of nothingness, and I thought that I am sick of hearing about the fate of gold. Holocaust assets!

I AM SICK OF HEARING ABOUT THOSE Schiele paintings, too. A few months ago I was unpacking my library and I came upon a book that once I treasured, but not anymore. I had heard about this book for years, and when I found a copy in Cambridge 20 years ago I gladly paid more than a student could afford for it. The book is called *Lost Treasures of Europe*. It was published by Pantheon in 1946. It is a volume of photographs, 427 photographs, of the artistic monuments that were destroyed during the war in Europe. It is a crushing book: the Mantegna frescoes in Padua, the Ponte Santa Trinità in Florence, the medieval buildings in Rouen and Tournai, hundreds of pages illustrating destruction that deserves to plunge every civilized individual into mourning. But, as I say, I cannot look at this book anymore. The catastrophe that it documents seems less catastrophic to me; and I mistrust its religion of culture. When the editor writes that he was deeply moved when an audience in Vienna in 1946 “broke into sustained applause” at the news that the U.S. Army had recovered the crown jewels and the coronation regalia of the Holy Roman Empire, and that “the loss or destruction of these prized heritages of the past becomes in fact a personal loss comparable to that of a friend,” his humanism is lost on me. The proper objects of humanism are humans.

IN THE DISCUSSION OF THE HOLOCAUST now, the authority of the philosophers and the historians is being usurped by the authority of the lawyers and the museum directors; and the subject, more and more, is money. I read about class-action suits against banks that stole Jewish deposits and insurance companies that stole Jewish policies and industrial corporations that employed Jewish slave labor, and I agree that there will be no justice in letting the “neutrals” and the opportunists and the collaborators get away with it; but there will be no justice also in not letting them get away with it. Whatever happens, in the matter of what transpired in Europe between 1933 and 1945 there will be no justice. There is no class action that is possible for *this* class. The fate of those wedding bands is as nothing compared to the fate of those husbands and those wives. I do not worry about anti-Semitism, in this regard; the Jews are not the only victims in the world who want their property back. I worry that the Jews are tiring of their history, tiring of what they know. The emergence of the new reparations industry represents the strange and sapping illusion that certain elements of Jewish destiny in the blood-field of Europe may be reversed. I understand that the money that is the object of all this litigation is “our” money, but what has litigation to do with sorrow? I really cannot bring myself to care about where the Monets of the martyrs will hang. I would rather grieve than sue. It seems more lucid.

PERHAPS MONEY IS SWAMPING TRAGEDY now because money is swamping everything now. It is a decade since the fall of the Berlin Wall. I remember telling a Polish friend, a few months after the wall fell, that dialectical materialism was about to be replaced by undialectical materialism. It was a fine joke, except that it is no longer funny. It is our good fortune, certainly, that history no longer places any limitations on the appetites of the West; but this means only that we must look for those limitations elsewhere. The discipline that we impose on ourselves will no longer be necessary for our physical survival, but it will be necessary for our philosophical survival. Still, I won’t kid myself. *The New York Times Magazine*, where a font is an idea, won’t let me kid myself. We are fat and we are acting fat. In the fifth of its stupefyingly silly “millennium issues,” the magazine extols “the self at the center of the universe” (did you know that a thousand years ago there were no individuals, because “the self was subordinated to church and king,” whereas now “many of us have a personal identity or a reasonable expectation of acquiring one”?); and in a gallery of “archetypal personalities, then and now,” it lists Faust with Lassie; and in a thoroughly counterfeit lament about conformity by Luc Sante, it instructs that

> right now, everything is for sale, including you, and if you are not saleable, you will starve. So you tailor and trim and adapt yourself, sand down your edges, maximize your appeal

as if there isn’t anybody who behaves differently. A nonconformist, I guess, is a conformist who writes a piece about nonconformity; and there are no heroes in the niches. Still, a little nausea would go a long way.

LEON WIESELTIER

THANKS TO PHILLIPS, WEARY TRAVELERS WILL ALWAYS HAVE A PLACE TO STOP AND REFUEL.

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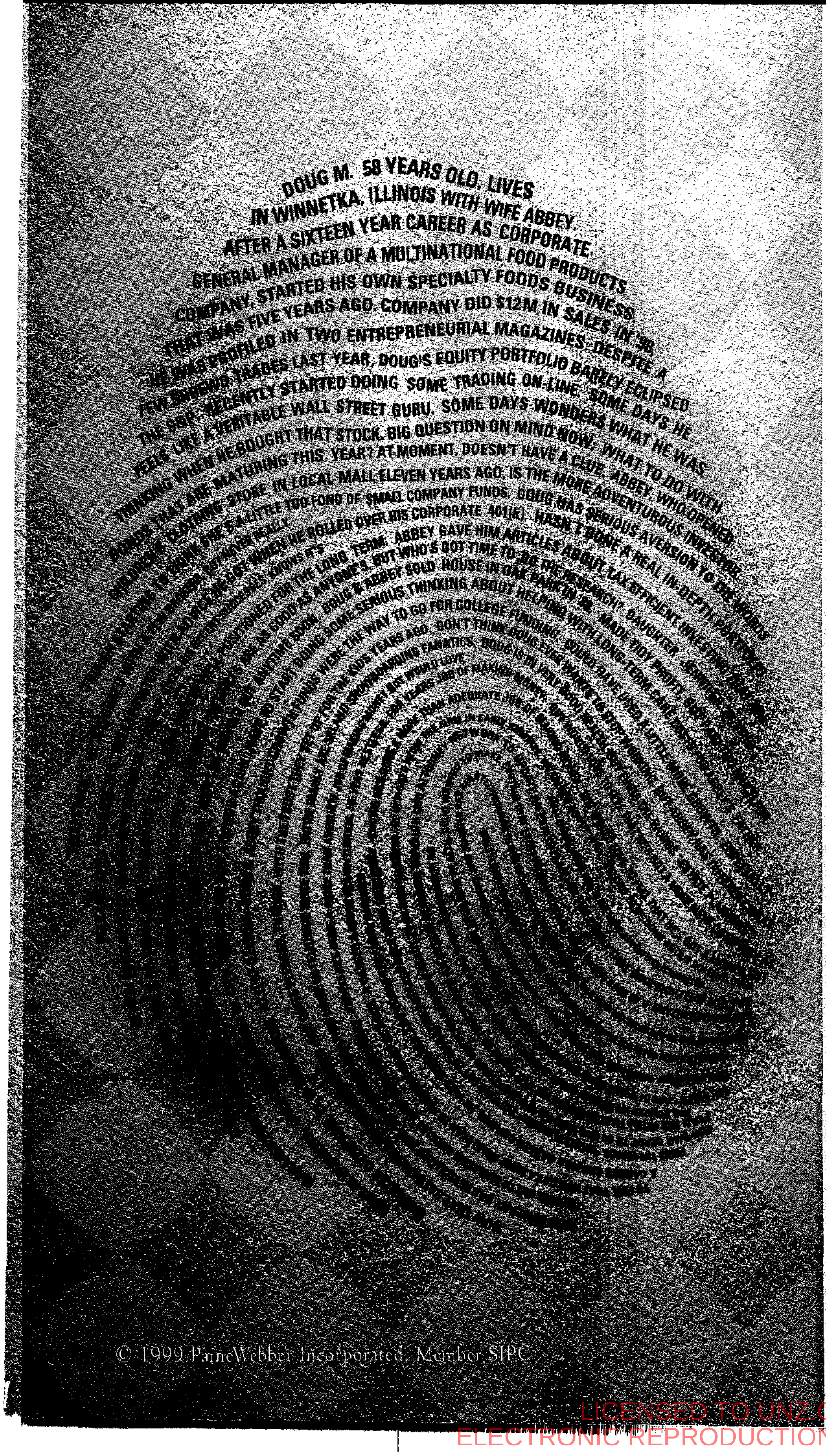
DOUG M. 58 YEARS OLD. LIVES
IN WINNETKA, ILLINOIS WITH WIFE ABBEY.
AFTER A SIXTEEN YEAR CAREER AS CORPORATE
GENERAL MANAGER OF A MULTINATIONAL FOOD PRODUCTS
COMPANY, STARTED HIS OWN SPECIALTY FOODS BUSINESS
THAT WAS FIVE YEARS AGO. COMPANY DID $12M IN SALES IN '98.
HE WAS PROFILED IN TWO ENTREPRENEURIAL MAGAZINES. DESPITE A
FEW SHREWD TRADES LAST YEAR, DOUG'S EQUITY PORTFOLIO BARELY ECLIPSED
THE S&P. RECENTLY STARTED DOING SOME TRADING ON-LINE. SOME DAYS HE
FEELS LIKE A VERITABLE WALL STREET GURU. SOME DAYS WONDERS WHAT HE WAS
THINKING WHEN HE BOUGHT THAT STOCK. BIG QUESTION ON MIND NOW: WHAT TO DO WITH
BONDS THAT ARE MATURING THIS YEAR? AT MOMENT, DOESN'T HAVE A CLUE. ABBEY, WHO OPENED
CLOTHING STORE IN LOCAL MALL ELEVEN YEARS AGO, IS THE MORE ADVENTUROUS INVESTOR.
A LITTLE TOO FOND OF SMALL COMPANY FUNDS. DOUG HAS SERIOUS AVERSION TO THE WORD
WHEN HE ROLLED OVER HIS CORPORATE 401(k). HASN'T DONE A REAL IN-DEPTH
FOR THE LONG TERM. ABBEY GAVE HIM ARTICLES ABOUT TAX EFFICIENT
ANYONE'S. BUT WHO'S GOT TIME TO DO THE RESEARCH? DAUGHTER
DOUG & ABBEY SOLD HOUSE IN OAK PARK IN '98
SOME SERIOUS THINKING ABOUT HELPING WITH
WAY TO GO FOR COLLEGE FUNDING
AGO. DON'T THINK

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